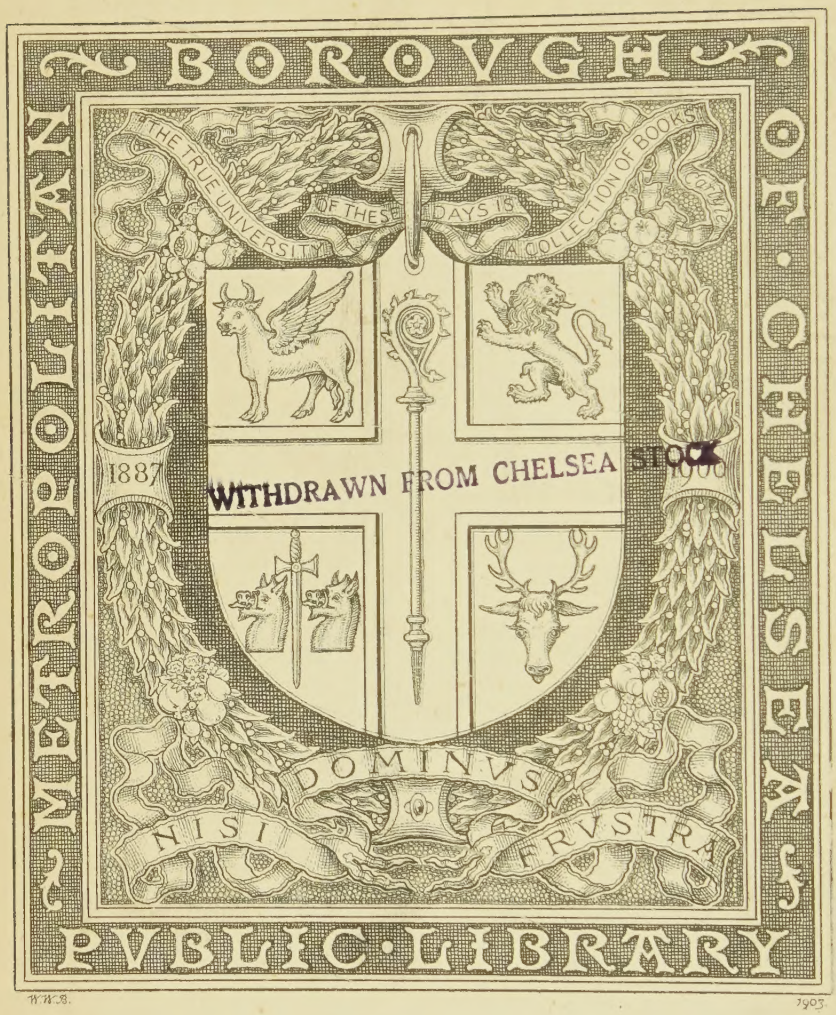
A PERAMBULATION OF THE HUNDRED OF WIRRAL



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A

PERAMBULATION

OF THE

HUNDRED OF WIRRAL

IN THE

COUNTY OF CHESTER

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE PRINCIPAL HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS, OLD HALLS, ANCIENT CHURCHES, AND INTERESTING VILLAGES SITUATED BETWEEN THE RIVERS MERSEY AND DEE

BY

HAROLD EDGAR YOUNG

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

WM. FERGUSSON IRVINE, M.A., F.S.A.

ILLUSTRATED WITH MAP, AND FIFTY-NINE PLATES

"Oh! piper let us be up and gone,
We'll follow you quick if you'll pipe us on,
For all of us want to go there."

LIVERPOOL
HENRY YOUNG & SONS
1909

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DEDICATION

My dear Father,—A good deal of water has flowed down the Dee since you held me by the hand and took me for my first walk in the Hundred of Wirral, and gave me my first swimming lesson in the Dee. Since those days I have wandered far in Europe, America, and Asia, yet have always returned to mine own land with a greater love for it and its characteristic scenery. In this little book I have attempted to describe a small but interesting tract of country in my close neighbourhood. Perhaps my reach has exceeded my grasp, but I have done my best.

I have been fortunate in having the advice of William Fergusson Irvine, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., who has done so much for Wirral history, and who has generously allowed me to consult him on some matters which were obscure to me. I know I should have done better had I consulted him more freely, but I desired to sail as far as possible under my own flag. For his kindly help he has already heard my thanks.

I have also been fortunate in receiving the valuable assistance of Alexander Reid, Esq., of West Kirby, who has supplied me with many of the illustrations for my book. He has accompanied me wherever I have asked him, and has taken the utmost pains with his pictures, developing and printing them with his own hand. I need not tell you—for he is an old friend of yours—that his work has been entirely a labour of love, and I owe him a deep debt of gratitude for it.

My thanks are also due to Arthur D. Holland, Esq., of Hooton; J. H. Clayton, Esq., of Willaston; the Rev. F. Sanders, M.A., F.S.A., Vicar of Hoylake; John R. Logan, Esq., M.B., C.M., of Liverpool; J. Fleming Stark, Esq., of Bromborough; Mr. G. T. Shaw, Chief Librarian of the City of Liverpool; and Mr. J. Harding, Librarian of the Mayer Free Library.

It is but natural that I should dedicate this book to you, even if affection did not impose it upon me, for you have other and outstanding claims. Seventy-three years ago you came, as a small boy, outside a stage-coach, rattling through the Hundred of Wirral before the era of the steam locomotive, finishing your long journey from Cornwall to Liverpool; and in your seventy-fifth year you rode your bicycle $75\frac{3}{4}$ miles in a

day, completing the last stage of the journey on the very road over which you had travelled in the stage-coach as a boy ; and in your eighty-seventh year, accompanied by one of your grandsons, you rode your bicycle 43 miles in a day through, and round and about Wirral.

If this work meets with your approval I shall consider my labour amply rewarded.

I am, your affectionate Son,

HAROLD E. YOUNG.

SANDGATE, BLUNDELLSANDS,
September 1909.

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SKETCH MAP OF THE HUNDRED OF WIRRAL, SHOWING THE AUTHOR'S ROUTE . . . . . *at end*

INTRODUCTION

When Sir Gawayne sought for the Green Knight, we are told that he came in his wanderings into "the wyldrenesse of Wyrale," but no one had heard of the object of his quest, and so he left this wild and pitiless region; a land that, in the words of the Petition of the "poor Commonalty of Wyrall" in 1376, "had suffered great harm, damage, and destruction" from the beasts of the forest, so that even the Churches were desolate and Divine services withheld. When Mr. Ormerod wrote his history a hundred years ago, he saw but little change from this dreary picture if we are to give full weight to his words, for he speaks of nearly every village as barren, desolate, dreary.

With such thoughts in mind, the reader who takes up Mr. Young's book is as one who passes from the gloom of a cave into the full blaze of midsummer sun. Truly the nineteenth must have been a century of miracles to have wrought such a change, and yet those who know this delectable land will not quarrel with Mr. Young for the warmth of his praise. Few large centres

of population can, like Liverpool, boast of such delightful and largely unspoilt country lying at the very door; country, moreover, that has historical associations so full of interesting and picturesque incident.

It is perhaps somewhat of a reflection on the dwellers between Mersey and Dee that it is left to a man from Lancashire to discover and tell all the charm of the Peninsula of Wirral; but it is travellers who write the best descriptions of the countries through which they wander, for most objects are so familiar to the dwellers there that they have long ago forgotten to notice them. So coming from South-west Lancashire, where the natural objects include Bootle, Widnes, St. Helens, and other centres of industry, the fresh green fields and flowery country lanes of the Cheshire peninsula and the varied views of mountain and sea have so inspired Mr. Young's pen that he cannot but tell the things he has seen and heard.

Mr. Young brings to his task the trained eye of a man who has travelled and observed, and he is able to take a wider view than the mere historical student, for he has an intimate knowledge of the work that has already been done in dealing with the history, geology, flora, and entomology of Wirral, and, what is better, has formed a shrewd estimate of the relative values

of the different writers, and so is able to know where to turn for his facts, and how much weight to attach to each authority. Mr. Young does not only address those who are interested in the history and archæology of the district, but the far wider circle of readers who wish to know about the district in which they live. At the same time he has exercised such a wise discretion in selecting and such care in checking his information that the student of local history will often find him a more trustworthy guide than more pretentious authors.

WM. FERGUSSON IRVINE.

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A PERAMBULATION OF WIRRAL

CHAPTER I

LELAND'S DESCRIPTION OF WIRRAL

It is only in comparatively recent years that the Hundred of Wirral has received the serious attention of the county historians it so richly deserves. Leland and the early itinerants describe it briefly, and it has been questioned whether the great Camden ever visited Wirral at all. The industrious antiquary, John Leland, who was born in London in the year 1506, and in 1533 was appointed by Henry VIII. to be "the King's Antiquary," and given authority to describe "all England's antiquities," wandered through England in his arduous search for many years, and a precious relic had to be well sheltered to escape his ever-watchful eye. So one day about the years 1536–1539 he came into Wirral, and describes it thus :—

"Wyrale begynnith lesse then a quarter of a mile of the very cite self of Chester, and withyn

a 2. bow shottes of the suburbe without the northe gate at a litle brooket caullid Flokars Broke that ther cummith ynto Dee Ryver, and ther is a dok wherat at spring tide a ship may ly, and this place is caullid Porte Poole.

"Half a myle lower ys Blaken Hedde, as an armelet of the grounde pointing oute. At this is an olde manor place longging to the Erle of Oxforde, and theryn lyith sumtyme Syr Gul. Norres.

"A mile be water lower hard on the shore is a litle village caullid Sauheho (Saughall).

"Lesse then a mile lower is Crabho (Crabhall).

"A myle lower is Shottewik Castelle on the very shore longging to the King: and therby ys a park.

"Shottewike townelet is a 3. quarters of a myle lower.

"And 2. mile lower is a rode in D(ee) caullid Salthouse, wher again it (on the) shore is a salt house cotage.

"Then is Burton hedde, whereby is a village almost a mile lower than Salt (House).

"ii. myles lower and more is Denwale Rode, and agayne it a farme place caullid Denwaulle Haul. It longith to Mr. Smithe, and more up into the land is Denwaulle (Denhall) village.

"ii. miles and more lower is Neston Rode, and ynward a mile ynto the land is Neston village.

"About a 3. miles lower is a place caullid the

Redde Bank, and ther half a mile withyn the land is a village caullid Thrustington (Thurstaston).

"A mile and more lower is Weste Kirkeby a village hard on the shore.

"And half a mile lower is Hillebyri, (Hilbre Point) as the very point of Wyrale.

"This Hillebyri at the floode is al environid with water as an isle, and than the *trajectus* is a quarter of a mile over and 4. fadome depe of water, and at ebbe a man may go over the sand. It is about a mile in cumpace, and the grounde is sandy and hath conies. There was a celle of monkes of Chestre, and a pilgrimage of our Lady of Hilbyri.

"The barre caullid Chester Barre that is at (the) very mouth of the sandes spuid oute of Dee Ryver is an 8. or 10. mile west south west from Hilbyri.

"It is by estimation a XVI. mile from the point of Hilbery to crosse strait over to the next shore in Lancastershire.

"For Lyrpoole (Liverpool) lyith a X. miles into the lande from the mouthe of Mersey Water, and lytle lak of XX. from the very barre of Mersey that lyith in the mayne se.

"From the poynt of Hylbyri to Lirpoole as it lyith withyn the lande a X. mile.

"From Hilbyri to cumpace about the shore of Wyral on Mersey side to Walesey (Wallasey)

village on the very shore, wher men use much to salten hering taken at the se by the mouth of Mersey, is a seven or eight miles.

"Thens a 2. myles to the fery house on Wyrale shore, and there is the *trajectus proximus* to Lyrpole a 3. miles over.

"Aboute half a quarter of (a) mile upward hard on Wyral shore is Byrk(et) a late a priory of a XVI. monkes as a celle to Chester without any village by it.

"Al the shore grounde of Wyral apon De side ys highe bankid, but not veri hilly grounde. And so ys the bank of Wyrale onto Briket on Mersey side.

"The *trajectus* from Hillebyri directely overthwart bytwixt Flint and Basingwark is at the ful se a VII. miles over."

The first printed work exclusively dedicated to Cheshire antiquities was "The Vale-Royall of England, or the County Palatine of Chester Illustrated, Performed by William Smith and William Webb," published by Daniel King in the year 1656. It was in three parts; the second by William Webb includes a most interesting Itinerary of each Hundred, written in the latter part of 1621. The Rev. Daniel Lysons published his excellent work entitled "Magna Britannia" in 1810, and devoted the whole of the second part of volume 2 to the County Palatine of Chester.

BOOKS ABOUT WIRRAL

The year 1819 was an important one for the Hundred of Wirral, for it was in that year Ormerod, whose great History of the County of Cheshire is a perpetual monument to his antiquarian and historical knowledge, published his book, and bestowed great attention to the Wirral peninsula. In 1847 Mr. William Williams Mortimer printed his history of the Hundred of Wirral, a most excellent work, but now unfortunately difficult to obtain; whilst in 1889 Mr. Philip Sulley published a very good and useful work entitled "The Hundred of Wirral," which was illustrated, and contained a map. In recent years Mr. W. Fergusson Irvine, M.A., F.S.A., the Rev. F. Sanders, M.A., F.S.A., Mr. Ronald Stewart Brown, M.A., and Mr. F. C. Beazley, F.S.A., have all written upon the Hundred, and all of them have produced notable works.

But though all of these books are excellent, and should be freely consulted by every one seriously interested in the history of the Hundred, there has not hitherto appeared any work which can be used by those wishing to explore some of the highways and byways of this interesting locality, in which they would find something more than is to be found in the ordinary guide-books of the appearance of the Hundred, a description of its principal roads, the interest attaching to its villages, its domestic architecture, old halls, interesting churches, and a general description of the

appearance of the surrounding country. It is true that Mrs. Hilda Gamlin produced her book entitled "'Twixt Mersey and Dee," but that again only partly described the Hundred, and it would probably have been rewritten, had not Death laid his icy hand upon the authoress some years after she had published her work.

It is to supply this deficiency that the present work has been undertaken, and although the author can lay no claim to any profound antiquarian knowledge of the Hundred, he has freely consulted the principal works written about it, and he possesses an intimate knowledge of its highways and byways, the result of nearly forty years close acquaintance with the district. It has been his good fortune to tramp the roads when they were strangers to the motor-car, and when the horses shied at the tall spider bicycles which were occasionally to be found on the highways; and although he has seen the Hundred alter greatly in population, and means of locomotion, yet despite its close proximity to the ever growing port and city of Liverpool, there are still portions of the district which are *terra incognita* to thousands of people; for it is still possible in little more than a half-hour's journey from Liverpool to find highways and byways, hills, meadows and woods little altered in appearance from what they were when the great Domesday Book was prepared; to see the hawk hovering,

to hear the nightjar, to see the squirrel leap from tree to tree; to wander by meadows and wood-sides full of sweet-singing birds, and to pause on some hill to admire the noble sea views; or to stoop to pick some pretty and interesting wild flowers, for the flora of the Hundred is good.

It is the author's intention to point the way to these highways and byways, and to briefly describe some of the places of interest to which they lead.

Wirral is somewhat singularly situated, for it lies safely between two rivers—one of them one of the most important waterways in the world—which wash its shores on either side. Along its western shore glides the silent Dee to its wide sandy estuary, which, after passing Chester, shows reach on reach of surprising beauty; whilst on the east the swiftly flowing Mersey hurries along, bearing upon its broad bosom the largest and swiftest steamers in the world. Away to the north it is guarded by the Irish Sea; so that it is a narrow peninsula of some eighteen miles in length by about six miles in breadth, its southern side ending in a low valley which spreads from the River Dee through Mollington, Backford, Chorlton, and Stoke to the river Mersey.

William Webb, M.A., clerk to the Mayor's Courts of Chester, and Sheriff to Sir Richard Lee, in his description of Wirral, written about

the year 1621, and printed in King's Vale-Royall, aptly describes it thus :—

"I have laboured," he says, "to cast the Hundred of Werral by the dimensions thereof into some resemblance, and though, geometrically considered, it comes nearest to the figure of a long square, or rather a rhomboides, yet because the long sides are not straight lines, nor the opposite ends equal in their distance, we must take it as it is irregular, and the nearest resemblance that I can give it, is the sole of a lady's left-foot pantofle, for the farthest north-west end, compassed with the sea, falls somewhat round ; then it narrows itself both ways, and between Bebbington on the east, and Oldfield on the west side, falls narrow of the sole ; then it widens itself either way to Stanney on one side and Burton on the other, where it is broadest ; then narrowing again till it points with the tip of the toe upon Chester liberties. Mr. Cambden fitly calls it a languet of the land, and promontory of the mainland, shooting into the sea, inclosed on the one side with Dee-mouth, on the other side with the Merzey. The Welsh Britons call it Killgurry, because it is an angle. That it was in old time a forest, I think cannot be doubted, but that it should not be inhabited, or disafforested, not till King Edward III.'s time, that I suppose to be true but in part ; for the very antiquity

of the church, some castles, monasteries, and the very manurage of the most part of it yet appearing, argue the contrary.

"But I will not contend, for it sufficeth me I can boast in behalf of the inhabitants there now, and of their industrious predecessors too, that it is now one of the most fertile parts, and comparable, if not exceeding, any other so much in quantity of the whole county besides. And this will our weekly market of Chester for corn and fish make good for me, and if I added flesh too, I should not miss it much."

No, he would not miss it much; for the produce of the Wirral farms still helps to supply the markets of Chester, Birkenhead, and Liverpool with corn and flesh.

Wirral is perhaps one of the pleasantest tracts of land in the three kingdoms, situated so close to a large and busy city; and although no rivers of any great size meander through its pleasant meadows to flow by large, clean-looking, and prosperous farm lands, it can still boast of two streams—the Birket, or Birken, and the Fender, the former of which, rising in the neighbourhood of Grange, flows in a somewhat meagre stream, it must be admitted, for it makes its way slowly and painfully across the plains to Moreton, whence it used to empty itself into Wallasey Pool; but in late years its course has been diverted by the

hand of man, and now the Mersey receives its waters. The other is the Fender, which rises a little north-west of Barnston, where it is known as Prenton Brook, and flows hard by Thingwall, passing under Prenton Bridge, by Woodchurch, where it becomes the river Fender, and joins its waters with the Birket, close to Bidston Moss.

The farm fields are well ditched, and there is a goodly sheet of water at Raby, called Raby Mere, which is a pleasant place to visit, and will be described in its proper place.

Generally speaking, the land is undulating, and there are few hills of any considerable height, the highest being about 340 feet above sea level. One range runs from Shotwick to West Kirby, having its highest elevation at Heswall, and the other from Spital to Bidston. From the summits of these hills are to be had many noble sea views, whilst in clear weather, away in the west, are to be seen the principal peaks of the Welsh mountains. So that from these high lands between two rivers you may look over the well-cultivated countryside, which is also pleasantly wooded; for the forest, which once covered parts of Wirral, has been laid low to give air, light, and room to the farm lands, and deer have been displaced by cattle, sheep, and horses, of which some of the best breeds are to be found in the Hundred. That this narrow peninsula was at

one time densely wooded is testified to by the old rhyme:

> "From Blacon Point to Hilbree,
> A squirrel may leap from tree to tree."

It is known that the Hundred was afforested by Randel de Meschines, fourth Earl of Chester, who, as a reprisal for some predatory expeditions of the men of Wirral, ordered their farms to be destroyed, and afforested the whole district, appointing Alan Sylvestre to the office of bailiff or chief ranger. The bailiwick of the forest was afterwards held by the Stanleys of Storeton and Hooton. "For nearly two centuries and a half, the inhabitants of the forest, and the small villages on its borders, continued the mere serfs of the barons, ever ready to embark in any expedition against their more civilised, or more opulent, neighbours. At length the citizens of Chester suffered so much from the proximity of the forest, and the shelter it afforded to the freebooters, that they complained to Edward the Black Prince, then Earl of Chester, at whose request his father ordered it to be disforested."[1]

The petition when Wirral was disforested, the horn of the forester of Wirral, and his warrant in 1283 for allowance to the workmen who at that time were busily engaged in rebuilding Chester Cathedral, are said to be still in

[1] Mortimer's "History of the Hundred of Wirral."

existence. The horn is preserved, and at one time was in the possession of Sir John Errington, and is nearly 17 inches long, 9½ inches in circumference at the broad end, and 2¼ inches at the tip, and is decorated with a brass rim.

Traces of the ancient forests which once covered Wirral are still to be found in the Hundred, in which have been discovered the remains of the Irish elk, horns of stags, and of the *Bos Taurus*, a native of the old British forests, whose descendants, the English wild cattle, are still to be found at Chillingham in Northumberland.

The highways throughout the Hundred are excellent, and the roads spread themselves out in nearly every direction. Generally speaking, they are of good surface and well engineered, those main arteries leading to Chester by Eastham, the one through Woodchurch and Gayton, and again by Hoylake, West Kirby, and Neston, being particularly well cared for, and of excellent

surface. Prior to the advent of the motor-car they used to be considered among the standard roads of the country, and are still very good, whilst numerous cross roads, often with excellent surfaces, and free from motor traffic, are to be found connecting eastern with western Wirral, and are a great contrast to the roads of the earlier years, for Bishop Cartwright makes the following entry in his diary :—

"*26th of February* 1687.—I received a letter from Sir Charles Porter, by his servant, to borrow my coach from Nesson, when I heard of his arrival, which I cheerfully granted.

"*6th March.*—I sent my coach after dinner to Nesson, to fetch Sir Charles Porter and his lady to Chester, which found his children set in a stage coach, broke in the quicksands, three miles from Chester ; and, having brought them back, went forward again to fetch Sir Charles and his lady against to-morrow morning's tide."

It must be borne in mind, when considering the vast improvements of the roads in Wirral, that Bishop Cartwright is probably describing some byway along the shore ; but the highways were often nearly impassable, although numbers of troops, as well as all sorts of merchandise, were constantly passing along the roads to and from Chester for embarkation for, and debarkation

from, Ireland and other places; and it is only by reading some of the old descriptions of the difficulties and dangers of travel in the centuries preceding our own, that we realise how vastly our horizon has been enlarged, and what narrow and circumscribed lives the rude forefathers of these hamlets led. That some few of them travelled as much as they did, making their pilgrimages to what in those days must have been very out-of-the-way places, says much for their endurance and patience.

The architecture of the Hundred, both ancient and modern, is not uninteresting, and the churches of Bebington, Eastham, Shotwick, Woodchurch, and West Kirby all possess architectural and historical interest. The old halls have nearly all fallen on evil days, and are now used as farm-houses, whilst some of them have entirely disappeared. The most interesting that remain are Leasowe Castle, Bidston, Brimstage, Poole, Puddington, Gayton, Irby, Thurstaston, and Greasby.

Birkenhead Priory

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CHAPTER II

BIRKENHEAD PRIORY

Searchers after the picturesque would scarcely go nowadays to the town of Birkenhead expecting to find an old priory hidden away amidst its long streets of shops and houses, and almost within hail of its busiest thoroughfare, for commerce has done its work, and a price has to be paid in the matter of picturesqueness for warehouses and busy docks. The majority of visitors to Birkenhead view the Park, the Docks, and Hamilton Square, and then pass on into the country in search of objects more inviting; yet at one time Birkenhead must have been a picturesque spot, as its very name denotes, for local antiquaries have long given up the theory that Birkenhead is called so because it was the head of the river Birken; and Mr. Harrison, in his "Place Names of the Liverpool District," gives the derivation of the name—"birken-head, head or promontory of the birches; Old Norse, biork; Anglo-Saxon, birce, birch; Old Norse, höfud; and Anglo-Saxon, heáfod-head." Certainly, even up to the early years of last century, the slopes to the

ferry were well wooded, as its name, Woodside, denotes.

Yet hidden away and surrounded by modern buildings, which climb nearly up to its walls, is the interesting Priory of Birkenhead. It seems, so much has the hand of man changed the face of the country, a strange situation for a monastic building, and there is a difficulty in fixing the precise date when the Priory was founded; but the name of Oliver, Prior of Birkenhead, occurs in the reign of King John. Doubtless the cathedral builders chose a fine situation for the Priory, for at the period of the building the land about Birkenhead was well timbered, and the situation of the Priory was carefully selected, and, placed on the red sandstone, guarded on three sides by the river Mersey. The Prior had the exclusive right of ferry from Birkenhead to Liverpool, and from the houses he held for the accommodation of travellers, and from the ferry, he is said to have derived a good revenue. "The demesne of the ancient Priory," says Mortimer, "was on a peninsular rock of red sandstone surrounded on three sides by the river Mersey, and the fourth gradually receding westward towards Claughton, where the grange was situated. The immediate precincts of the convent were surrounded by a wall, of which there are now no remains. The ruins of the building exhibit a variation from the order of the majority of monastic houses. The

sharp sea breezes which prevail on these coasts two-thirds of the year seemed to have induced the founder to place the church in a more sheltered situation than it would have occupied in the ordinary arrangement of a convent; it was therefore placed on the south side of the pile of buildings, protected from the prevailing winds by the higher ranges which formed the north and west sides."

A writer in 1831, describing the situation of Birkenhead Ferry and the Priory, says: "A lawn extending from the riverside to the front of an antique mansion, situated on the most elevated parts of the grounds, was studded with majestic trees of some centuries' standing, and carpeted with a turf whose verdure might vie with that of the 'emerald isle.' Across this lawn a winding footpath conducted the traveller to the ruins of the ancient Priory of Birkenhead, the chapel of which still remains entire; and the whole demesne was secured from the encroachment of the tide by a natural barrier of rock overhung by copsewood. Altogether it formed a scene of rural beauty not often surpassed; and peculiarly pleasing to the eye of the returning mariner, to whom green fields and luxuriant foliage present a delightful contrast to the unvarying monotony of the ocean."

The ruins should certainly be visited by all in search of the picturesque, and for those interested in early ecclesiastical architecture they form an interesting and instructive study. That most

talented architect, Rickman, whose book on "Gothic Architecture" is so justly admired and eagerly sought after, speaks enthusiastically about the Priory, and the mouldings at the entrance of the refectory were adopted by him as a study. It is greatly to be hoped that what remains to us of this most interesting record of a bygone age will be carefully preserved, and that the Corporation of Birkenhead may, by the removal of some of the ugly modern stables which creep upon it, improve its situation, for "architecture," John Ruskin says, "is the work of nations."

Passing out of Birkenhead, on the New Chester Road, where now electric tramways busily run upon its well-trafficked surface, we come in a little over a mile to Tranmere, where it is wise to hurry on, for the place has small interest to the sightseer, rows of poor shops and houses now occupying the site where once stood an interesting old hall, long since taken down by a speculative builder. All trace of this hall would have passed away had not Mr. Joseph Mayer rescued it from oblivion by having it drawn and engraved, at the same time printing an interesting description of it in the "Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historic Society" for 1851. He writes:—

"The Hall is situated on the brow of the hill, overlooking, like a mother, the picturesque village which surrounds it, and commanding a grand view

Tranmere Hall

CHELSEA

of the river Mersey, whose expansive waters make a beautiful feature in the scene as they pass by the great 'city of ships' seen in the distance. It is of the usual style of the period, with the centre recessed, the wings having the customary high-pitched gables; the stone-work of that character which was introduced after the Post and Petrel, mouldings and mullions of windows, plain fillet and ovolo, with addition of ogee for jamb; and with the prevailing larger and lesser projections of offices belonging to the domestic affairs of the family, which add to the effect of the outline of the whole, though not remarkable for any external display or architectural features.

"In front of the house is a large garden, the entrance to which is from the high road, through an ornamental doorway, over the top of which, on the right side, are the initials G.L. and the motto 'Labor Vincit Omnia,' with the date 1614, and on the left of it the initials A.L. This door leads into the garden, surrounded by a high wall on the road side, in which are evidences of its having been prepared with loopholes, for defence in case of an attack by an enemy from without. Crossing the garden you arrive at the 'big door' of the house, approached by a flight of steps which takes you into the great hall, more remarkable for its heaviness than for any picturesque effect or peculiarity. Crossing to a side door you get to the staircase, which is of modern

construction, and ascending it you come to a large room, no doubt used on state occasions, or else the principal private room of the lord's family. It has a large Palladian chimney-piece, lower column fluted and reeded, upper plain Doric, very bold cornice and frieze on front, and the slab is carved very deeply in writing, 'Edward Markland.' The ceiling is divided into six square panels by oak beams and ornamented with lions, fleurs de lis, &c., in parquetry."

"Thou pretty wench thats plucking of a flower
Keepe close the flower of thy virginity.
Beware, for oathes and promises have power
And woers many times will sweare and lye."

He then describes a curiously decorated window, of large proportions, filled with stained glass, on which are figures. A specimen of one is shown here. "The devices and mottoes of poetry are quaint and in accordance with the decorations of most of the houses of any note belonging to our forefathers." One of the verses ran—

> "Thou pretty wench thats plucking of a flower
> Keepe close the flower of thy virginity.
> Beware, for oathes and promises have power
> And woers many times will sweare and lye."

Mr. Mayer traced the resting-place of these interesting specimens of stained glass, and succeeded in purchasing them, so that they are now in the Mayer Museum at Bebington. But the hall, like the primroses which once lined the

banks hereabout, where now the gutters run, has passed away. Change is inevitable in a progressive country, but it must always be remembered that in beauty it is possible to change a progressive district for the worse. What would Bernard de Tranemoll, its local lord in 1267, think of all the change, could he once more revisit the glimpses of the moon?

In another mile we reach Rock Ferry, once one of the prettiest places on the Mersey, and a favourite place of residence towards the middle of last century of the merchants and shipowners of Liverpool. Now the town has crept hard on to it, and one has to go farther afield before feeling that the countryside has been reached. But turning into Rock Park there is still the feeling of the country. In front is the river Mersey, and the houses are large, most of them having well-planted gardens, in which are some good trees; and although many of the houses are unoccupied, it is still a pleasant place, and it was doubtless for its quietness, and to feel he was in the country after his day's work was ended, that Nathaniel Hawthorne chose it as his place of residence, taking up his abode at No. 26 on September 1, 1853. He says: "Rock Park, as the locality is called, is private property, and is now nearly covered with residences for professional people, merchants, and others of the upper middling classes, the houses being mostly built, I

suppose, on speculation, and let to those who occupy them. It is the quietest place imaginable. On either side there is a thick shrubbery, with glimpses through it of the ornamental portals, or into the trim gardens with smooth-shaven lawns of no large extent, but still affording reasonable breathing space."

"Childhood and youth," says Emerson, "see all the world in persons," and certainly one sees the immediate neighbourhood of Rock Park and the Dell in the person of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose writings are not only a delight to all Americans, but to all English people too, who set a proper value on good English and upon style.

He was somewhat of a stranger, and held himself aloof from the residents in Rock Ferry, being of a shy, simple, and manly character; but to the writer's father, Henry Young, he stood on the most friendly terms. Mr. Young writes :—

"My first recollection of Mr. Hawthorne is of a dark-haired, retiring, and gentlemanly-looking man, who came to see me, and without a word to anybody or from any one to him, proceeded to investigate the books. In a little while he took from the shelf an uncut copy of 'Don Quixote' in two volumes, illustrated by Johannot, asked me the price, paid the money, and requested that the books be sent to 'Mr. Hawthorne at the American Consulate.'

"Then he began coming almost daily, after a long time growing somewhat familiar. He would inquire much about books, in which he took the keenest interest. The late Henry A. Bright, of Liverpool, author of 'The English Flower Garden,' and the intimate friend of the late Lord Houghton (Richard Monckton Milnes), to whom he introduced Hawthorne, was his single warm friend and confidant in England, and they frequently called together to examine and discuss books. Mr. Hawthorne gave Mr. Bright the complete manuscript of 'Transformation' ('The Marble Faun'), and he had it very appropriately bound. It remains in the possession of the Bright family to this day.

"When the family finally left England, Mr. and Mrs. Hawthorne, and, I think, Miss Una Hawthorne, called to shake hands and say good-bye. Hawthorne's personal appearance and demeanour very strongly reminded me of Dr. Martineau, and Mrs. Hawthorne's sprightliness was a delightful set-off to her husband's extreme diffidence and quietude."

Continuing through the Park, and just before coming abreast of the New Ferry pier, it is well to pause and look across the river Mersey. Opposite, the land ascends from the river to Mossley Hill, and a good view is to be had of both the lower and upper reaches of the Mersey.

"Beauty is never a delusion," Hawthorne said, and this is the way he took his evening walk, sometimes, it must be admitted, sighing at what he considered some acrid quality of the English, and wishing himself back in his native land, as he sauntered through the Dell, and by a pleasant way through the fields to the New Chester Road, noting when the cuckoo called earlier than was his wont, and listening to the larks singing—

"*May* 31*st.*—Last Sunday week," he writes, "for the first time I have heard the note of the cuckoo. 'Cuck-oo-cuck-oo,' it says, repeating the word twice, not in a brilliant metallic tone, but low and flute-like, without the excessive sweetness of the flute."

It is a pleasant enough ramble through this little byway, with its literary associations, but once out on the New Chester Road, in a mile or more, literature is forgotten, and commerce commands attention; for here is Port Sunlight, its blocks of trim houses showing many interesting styles of architecture, with lawns and nice little gardens in front of each house, and, in many cases, ivy or climbing plants clinging to the walls. It is an agreeable change from the long rows of ugly streets filled with houses of the brick-wall-with-four-holes-in-it pattern, which are passed all the way from Birkenhead to this oasis.

"Commerce," says Emerson, "is a game of skill which every one cannot play, and which few men can play well." Mr. W. H. Lever has shown the world that commerce is a game which he can not only play, but play well; and, certainly, in founding this village for the men who help him to play the game, he has earned not only their thanks, but the thanks of the general community.

Mr. Lever came to Wirral from Warrington, where he had founded a successful business, in search of cheap land, and eventually decided to purchase the present site of his great soap works, with the land adjoining Bromborough Pool, for £200 per acre. This he proceeded to drain, and then to demolish what insanitary houses were already there, and to lay out the space as a village, in which his workers would find healthful, clean, and restful homes in the near neighbourhood of their work. Altogether he has erected over seven hundred excellent houses, which are built in blocks, and sometimes in groups of two. Many architects have competed for the work at various times, so that many styles of architecture are in evidence, but nowhere does taste seem to clash, and there is harmony and not discord. Generally speaking, the houses are built of brick and sandstone, with the upper portion rough-cast, and perhaps about five houses go to the acre. Some houses, occupied

by the clerks, foremen, or skilled mechanics, have parlours, but in most cases they consist of a large kitchen, scullery, pantry, and three bedrooms, and are rented at from 5s. 6d. to 6s. 6d.; the houses containing a parlour costing 7s. 6d. per week, including taxes.

At first one is amazed to see that the occupants keep their gardens so well and their lawns so trim; but inquiry rubs some of the romance away, for the gardens and lawns were so neglected that the Company took over their management, and pays specially trained gardeners to look after them and keep them in their present neat and trim condition. There are, however, spaces set apart from the houses, which may be hired as allotments, 10 perches costing the cultivator 5s. a year, payable in two instalments. One man who was digging over his allotment, with whom the writer conversed, said he was very happy to get it, and that he had succeeded in keeping his family in potatoes and vegetables all through the winter until February, when he had to purchase again until his new crop was ready.

Pleasant roads, with trees on either side, run in various directions, and a bridge across some low-lying land, called Victoria Bridge, has been constructed; a handsome church has been built, together with lecture- and dining-halls, a library, and museum, the former containing a reference

PORT SUNLIGHT

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library of technical works; a cottage hospital, gymnasium, open-air plunge-bath, and a club. The shops consist of a co-operative store, a butcher's, hairdresser's, and newsagent's.

Altogether, this handsome village contains nearly 4000 souls, living for the wages they earn, under nearly ideal conditions as regards sanitation and healthful surroundings, for Mr. Lever early recognised that work was made for man, and not man merely for work. Whether in the end his scheme will be the success it deserves to be, time alone can prove. Certainly it deserves to be a success, for the founder has set out, to use his own words, "to socialise and christianise business relations, and get back again into the office, factory, and workshop to that close family brotherhood that existed in the good old days of hand labour." It is well, however, to remember that "the good old days of hand labour" very often meant for the labourer living and working through long hours under insanitary conditions.

More recently Mr. Lever has instituted a very ingenious system of profit-sharing, taking for his motto, "Waste not, want not." Under his scheme the majority of his workers, who are also his tenants, receive, besides their wages, a share of the annual profits of the Company.

CHAPTER III

BEBINGTON

A little to the north-west a good road runs up to Bebington, and shortly before entering the village, nearly opposite to a picturesque old cottage, built in the Cheshire half-timber style, in excellent preservation, with a thatched roof, a draper's shop will be noticed, and on the lintel of the window is the footprint of the Cheirotherium Storetonense, a great extinct animal whose footprints are broad like a hand, and who left the impression of his feet on the sand before it hardened under great pressure into sandstone. The stone was quarried from the neighbouring quarries at Storeton, and, on splitting it, the impression of the foot was distinctly visible, so the mason has very wisely left the stone undressed, turning the face of it bearing the impression of the foot to the street.

It is impossible to approach Bebington without peeping cautiously at the ancient church spire to note the altitude of the ivy, for there is an ancient Cheshire prophecy that the end of the world will be at hand as soon as the ivy reaches the top of

By Storeton Quarries

the spire; and yet another legend states that it was really intended to build the church at Tranmere, to where the stone was carted, but in the night-time it was mysteriously removed to its present site, so it was deemed unwise to refuse a position that had been so miraculously selected.

Bebington Church is externally, and internally, one of the most interesting in the Hundred of Wirral, and in ancient days was called Whitchurch, or White Church, which is the name mentioned by the Venerable Bede (who died A.D. 735, and was the most eminent writer of his day) as the usual name given by the Saxons to the new buildings of stone which took the place of the wooden buildings; and that industrious writer, John Stow, in his "Survey of London," which appeared in 1598, says the stone walls of the city were first invented by Bennett, a monk of Wirral.

The church, which stands on a slight elevation above and a little beyond the village, is dedicated to St. Andrew, and still retains traces of its Saxon architecture. Ormerod says: "The church of Bebington consisted originally of a nave, south aisle, and chancel. The two former of these are still remaining, and are divided by a range of Saxon arches, resting on massy cylindrical columns. At the extremity of the south aisle is a handsome tower surmounted by a lofty spire, of

less antiquity than the part of the fabric to which it is attached. The rest of the building has been replaced by another chancel with side aisles of large dimensions and extreme loftiness, finished in the style of the splendid architecture of the reign of Henry VII. It appears to have been the intention of the builder to have erected a central tower, from the formation of the four western piers of the chancel, and, by an arrangement in the roof of the side aisles, he has contrived to give this part, internally, the effect of transepts. The design was interrupted before the vaulting was finished, but the parts erected have every appearance of having formed part of a regular plan, which, if it had proceeded to completion, would have presented one of the finest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture in Cheshire."

There is an interesting Norman font, and some beautifully decorated windows filled with modern stained glass, that to the memory of Sarah Rodger being particularly notable, for it is of four lights containing full-length figures of Sarah, Hannah, Ruth, Esther, the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth, Mary of Bethany, and Dorcas.

It is nearly impossible not to be reminded of the great battle of Flodden Field when Bebington is reached, because a branch of the famous Bebington family fought in that great fight between James IV. of Scotland and an English army,

Bebington Church

CHELSEA

under the Earl of Surrey, on September 9, 1513, and it is pleasant to remember that it was the men of Lancashire and Cheshire who took part in the famous charge with Sir Edward Stanley. Listen to the old chronicler, Raphael Holinshed, the first edition of whose chronicles was published in 1577, only sixty-four years after the battle was fought: "Of the left-hand wing was Capteine Sir Edward Stanleie knight, with the residue of the power of the two counties palatine of Chester and Lancaster;" and then he describes the manner in which Sir Edward Stanley led the men of Cheshire and Lancashire in his decisive charge: "On the left hand at the same instant Sir Edward Stanlie, having begun to incounter with the Scots on that side, forced them to come downe into a more even ground: and brought to that point with such incessant shot of arrowes as his archers bestowed amongst them, that to avoid the danger of that sore and sharpe storme, the Scots were constreined to breake their arraie, and to fight not closed togither in order of battell, but insunder, one separated from another, so that their standards began to shrinke here and there. Which thing when Sir Edward Stanleie perceived, forthwith bringing about three bands which he had kept in store for such like purpose, he invaded the open sides of his enimies by a fresh onset, and put them in such disorder, that they were not able anie longer to abide the violence of the

Englishmen mightilie preassing upon them: so that taking themselves to flight, and running headlong downe the stiepe descent of the mounteine, they escaped to the woods and there saved them-selves. But the Earles of Argile and Lenox, dooing what they could to staie their people from running awaie, were slaine in the same place." So ended this grievous battle, in which the Cheshire and Lancashire archers did great execution, and it is said that there "was not a worshipful Scots family that did not own a grave on Brankstone moor." But the families of Cheshire own some graves there, too, so that if the Scots received good blows, without doubt they paid them too, for Richard Bebington, a younger branch of the Bebingtons of Little Bebington, then settled at Nantwich, had six sons and a younger brother lying stiff and stark on that stricken field. They were presumably fighting in company, and rest assured that, before they were all slain, a good many Scotsmen had become for the first, and last time, landed proprietors.

The Manor of Higher Bebington passed away to the Minshulls, and it is to this family that William Webb alludes when he writes: "Next which lies Nether Bebbington and Over Bebbington, the precincts whereof take up in this tract a large extent: the one a church-town, with a fair church and goodly parsonage, the other a member

of the parish, and where John Minshal Esq., of Minshal, hath great store of fair possessions."

Despite the growth of factories in the close neighbourhood, Bebington is still a pretty village, and yet "hath great store of fair possessions," for it was chosen as the residence of the late Joseph Mayer, F.S.A., who was born at Newcastle-under-Lyne, and, having made a fortune in business in Liverpool, retired to this pretty village, dying in the seventy-second year of his age. He bequeathed his valuable collection of porcelain to the city of Liverpool, and Pennant House and gardens, together with his collection of books, prints, pictures, and sculpture, to the village of Bebington; so that there is a small public park, a free library, and a museum in this little place. The museum is of no great interest, but it contains several interesting drawings by W. G. Herdman, Samuel Austin, R. Caddick, W. Daniels, and G. Stubbs, R.A. Some sculpture, mostly the work of G. Fontana, consists for the greater part of busts of Mr. Mayer's personal friends. The most interesting are Charles Dickens, Josiah Wedgwood, and several of Joseph Mayer, besides a bust of the eminent antiquary, Thomas Wright, F.S.A., and a good medallion of Charles Roach Smith. Among the miscellaneous objects are an arm-chair, formerly the property of Robert Burns, and three compartments of the window taken from Tranmere

Old Hall, with full-length figures, one of which is inscribed :—

> "This round we laughe, we drinke, we eate,
> Es tells you that we wante noe meate :
> Al sorrow is in good liquor drownde
> As circle soth the cupps goe round."

Charles Dickens visited Liverpool in 1869, and in commemoration of his visit, and of the high esteem in which Mr. Mayer held the talented author, one of the avenues in the prettily kept garden is called the Dickens Avenue, and a stone is erected in it bearing the inscription, "Dickens Avenue, April 10th, 1869."

The free library is well used, and a number of good and some out-of-the-way books may be consulted, so that the residents of Bebington possess a means of attaining the wisdom which the founder considered so beneficial, for he has affixed stone tablets outside the library on which are deeply cut :—

"Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding";

and

"Take fast hold of instruction : let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life."

In Bebington there is a curious charity which occurs in few other counties. In the year 1655 Henry Goodacre left £20 to purchase cows for the poor peasants, and in 1670 an additional

amount was left for the same charity. Mortimer says : "The earliest accounts are lost, but from the year 1682 a regular statement has been kept. There were then 29 cows; in 1712, 26; in 1732, 26; in 1772, 16, which were gradually reduced to 9, the number in 1815. The hire at first fixed at fourpence a year was afterwards raised to 2/8, at which it continued until 1797, when it was advanced to 3/ per year. The cows were lent to such persons only as the rector and the churchwardens may approve, on their finding security among their fellow-parishioners for the good usage of the cows, their production when required, and the payment of the yearly rent. Every encouragement is given to poor persons willing to advance any portion of the cost of a cow, which from the book appears to have been in 1692 about 60/; the purchases made in 1815 were at £9. The horns of the cows are branded with the initials of the rector and churchwardens, and the parties to whom they are lent are bound to produce them on the 25th April. The rents paid for their hire, and a few small fines from the petty sessions, are the only sources of revenue by which this excellent charity has been supported—a charity which, under the auspices of the present and late rectors, has been productive of much good to many poor labourers and widows, who have succeeded to the small farmers to whom the benefaction was originally confined." The

form of this excellent charity has now changed, and the poor obtain relief from the invested funds in the ordinary way.

There is still a rural feeling in Bebington, and many of the cottages are pretty, with nice old-fashioned gardens; and in the early part of the nineteenth century the mail coaches used to pass through Bebington village, for the mails crossed by Tranmere Ferry, and the coaches with their complement of passengers rattled briskly over Dacre Hill, and through Bebington village, to Neston and Chester. But when the New Chester Road was made in 1844 Bebington was left, so to speak, out in the cold, and the occupiers of the cottages ceased to see the coaches and to guess at the destination of the passengers. So Bebington went peacefully to sleep, and awaiting brisker days saw the nearer places grow in population and importance. It has, however, awakened again, for great works have come into the close neighbourhood, and, turning to the south-west, in a short walk the village of Port Sunlight is entered.

Returning to the New Chester Road, which is carried over Bromborough Pool by a stone bridge, on the left a finger-post will be found pointing the way to Bromborough Pool. The little road does not look particularly inviting, and the traveller generally hurries along to the interesting village of Bromborough; but instructed pedestrians turn

Court House, Bromborough Pool

Elephant and Castle, Lion and Crown, Dragon

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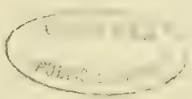
down the road, and are amply rewarded, for almost immediately they come to the Court House, now called Court House Farm, built about the year 1680, or perhaps a little later, by the Hardwares, a celebrated Chester family. It is a good specimen of the architecture of the latter part of the seventeenth century, having bay windows and indented and scalloped gables. The Hardwares were leading Puritans and afterwards Nonconformists, showing their puritanical spirit in Chester as early as 1599, in respect to the Guilds, or Incorporated Companies, for the regulation of trade. These Companies from time immemorial did homage to the Mayor on Midsummer's Day by their governors walking before him with banners, and in processions, attended by various pageants and devices. But some pieces in the show were of too strong a character for Henry Hardware, who was Mayor in 1599, and he "caused the giants in the Midsummer Show not to go: the devil in his feathers not to ride for the butchers, but a boy as the others, and the cuppes, and cannes, and dragon, and naked boy, to be put away: but caused a man in complete armour to go before the show in their stead." Bull-baiting caused him great offence, and he ordered the bull-ring to be taken up; and two youths, Hugh Case and William Shurlock, who were caught playing football in St. Werburgh's Cemetery during sermon time, so



roused his ire that he fined them 2s.—no small sum in those days. Eventually, owing to the Hardwares' example, and that of other leading Puritans, all shows and pageants were suspended, and "the giants and hobby-horses all fell a prey to the worms and moths." However, the pendulum swung the other way in 1657, when it was determined to revive "the ancient and laudable custom of the Midsummer Show, by the late obstructive times much injured." The house is now divided into two—the eastern end being occupied by a farmer, and the western end by a private resident. Two of the eastern rooms are interesting, and one contains a painting set in an overmantel. On the western side is a meadow, on which formerly stood the Manor House of the Abbots of St. Werburgh, occupying a very strong, and indeed almost impregnable position, on the neck of land guarded on the north by Bromborough Pool, which twists and turns like a huge serpent, and hides itself behind the numerous soap, candle, and oil-cake works which are situated on its banks, for at high tide there is a good depth of water in the Pool, and small steamers and barges are thus enabled to discharge the raw produce and reload the manufactured article almost at the factory doors.

The moat which surrounds the site of the Manor House is still traceable for nearly its entire length, as well as some outer and inner

works, but not a stone of the original building is to be found, though doubtless a little spade-work on the meadow would reveal the original foundations, and perhaps other matters of interest. The moat is of considerable depth, though now only partly filled with rain-water, and oaks and holly bushes have sprung up on either side, so that the original construction of the moat and works only reveal themselves on a nearer examination, and at once show that he must have paid good blows who took such a position, well held by resolute men.

Ormerod writes: "The manor house of Bromboro' is one of those which was directed by the charter of Earl Randle to be maintained in a state of security and convenience for the holding of Courts appertaining to Chester Abbey; and the strength of this situation, as well as of the works still remaining round their other manor house of Irby, are proof of the fears entertained by the monks of the incursions of the Welshmen, at that early period. After the separation of Eastham and Bromborough, the view of frank pledge for both manors continued to be held at this manor house, until they finally fell into different hands at the dissolution."

It was to the Court House, now standing, that the celebrated, pious, and learned minister, Matthew Henry, author of the commentary, "An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,"

came courting, and eventually married, a daughter of the house of Hardware. He was born at Broad Oak farmhouse, Malpas, and in 1687 was chosen pastor of a Nonconformist congregation at Chester. The Hardwares of Bromborough became extinct by the death of Henry Hardware, Esq., of Liverpool, about the year 1790.

A little farther, on the south bank of the Pool, is situated the great works of Price's Patent Candle Company, and it is well worth while walking through the village the Company has erected for its workpeople. Owing to its remoteness from the main road the village is not greatly visited, and Port Sunlight is looked upon as the first and only model village in Wirral; yet as far back as 1853 the directors of Price's saw the wisdom of erecting good, well-situated, and cheap houses for those on whose good health and labour the success of the Company relied, and 139 cottages have been built, in addition to the houses for members of the staff. Although not nearly so interesting as examples of architecture as those erected by Mr. Lever at Port Sunlight, they are good and well built, the accommodation in the larger cottages consisting of a sitting-room, kitchen, scullery, and two bedrooms, rented at between 3s. 6d. and 6s. per week, including in every case a garden, water supply, and rates. In addition to the cottage gardens, nearly five acres of allotment gardens are well cultivated by the

Bromborough Pool

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tenants, for which they are charged 6d. per rod per annum.

John Ruskin writes: "Your labour only may be sold, your soul must not," and carrying out this spirit in the treatment of their workers, a recreation ground of six and a half acres, ideally situated, facing the Mersey, and provided with an excellent cricket pavilion, has been set aside for their use, and, in addition, there is a large enclosed crown bowling green.

Looking over the recreation ground, and facing the Mersey, are the chapel (Church of England, erected in 1890, and placed under the care of the Company's private chaplain), the schools, and village hall. There is also a library, reading-room, Mutual Improvement and Horticultural Societies, besides a village band. The village also contains an Industrial and Provident Society, which is managed by a committee of the tenants, and to encourage thrift there is a penny savings bank, and also a bank for the men and women resident in the village, the Company allowing 3 per cent. interest on all deposits.

There is, too, an Isolation Hospital, the Company providing a medical officer; but, thanks to the healthful situation of the village, and the care the Company has for its workers, that building is generally empty. The population of the village is 683.

Returning to the main road we pass some

meadows on the slopes of the Mersey which have always been called locally, and are marked on the Ordnance Survey, as the Wargraves. The scholarly Gibson, editor of the Saxon Chronicle, mentions Brunburh in Cheshire as one of the places where the celebrated battle of Brunanburh may have been fought, and where Athelstan—Alfred's golden-haired grandson, upon whom the King had girded as a child a sword, set in a golden scabbard—overthrew, and in a great decisive battle, in which it is computed there were 100,000 combatants, destroyed the forces of Anlaf and Constantine in the year 937, achieving his victory over the allied Danes, Irish, Scots, and Welsh.

Inserted in the Saxon Chronicle is a long and splendid war-song commemorating the event. It says :—

> "Five Kings lay
> On that battle field :
> In bloom of youth
> Pierced through with swords :
> So also seven
> Of Anlaf's Earls."

Gibson states "that in Cheshire there is a place called Brunburh, and certainly old maps of Cheshire spell Bromborough Brunburh," and there is no other place whose name and situation more closely correspond to the name and description in the Saxon Chronicle.

However, Mr. Wilkinson, Mr. Hardwick, and some other weighty writers believe, and give some good reasons for believing, that the battle was fought in the country lying between the Ribble and the Mersey.

Yet, again, it is argued that the Saxon Chronicle distinctly says :—

> "They won a lasting glory,
> With the edges of their swords
> By slaughter in battle,
> Near Brunanburh,"

and that there was but one Brunanburh at the time the battle was fought, just as there is only one Bromborough to-day ; that when the Danish King Anlaf set sail from Dublin with his allies, the King of the Scots and the Welsh Chiefs, what could be more natural than that they should make for the Mersey, which, like the Dee, was a well-known and favourite place for embarking for Ireland, and where there was already in Wirral a Norse population on whom they might rely for friendly support.

But wherever the Battle of Brunanburh[1] was fought, tradition alleges that a great battle was fought on the fields named the Wargraves, and many Wirral men look over the fields towards the Mersey in the evenings, and in their mind's

[1] Skene, in his "Celtic Scotland," says : "The site of the great battle is one of the problems in English history which has not yet been solved," but he favours the neighbourhood of Aldborough in Yorkshire.

eye behold the Danes making their last stand on the Wargraves, and see the Saxons in stern array fiercely pressing their enemies on either hand—the Danish rearguard holding a strong position, whilst the remnant of an army escaped on board their ships lying in Bromborough Pool.

A little farther on is Bromborough village, which Ormerod, writing early in the nineteenth century, describes as "an antient respectable village chiefly built with red sandstone and situated near the estuary at the distance of 11 miles from Chester." It is a pretty village, and the cross standing in its square at once commands attention, for the base and steps are ancient, but a new shaft and head have been added more recently. Opposite is the interesting house now called Manor Farm, bearing the date of 1676, at which date the house was partly rebuilt, and over a disused doorway are the arms and supporters of Charles the First, with the lilies of France quartered. Inside is some interesting oak panelling capped by some carved busts of ladies in the costume of the period of Henry VIII.; and upstairs there is another interesting room, bearing over the fireplace three curious panels carved in red sandstone, representing the elephant and castle, the lion and crown, and the dragon and spear.

Close by is the church, which was erected in 1864 and completed on the dedication of the tower and bells, on October 28, 1880. It has

Bromborough Cross

some good modern stained glass, and the east window, containing a telling representation of the Crucifixion, is particularly noticeable. An ancient Anglo-Saxon church formerly existed here, and Ormerod saw it, and fortunately describes it, figuring the doorway of the chancel within a semicircular arch. He considered the greater part of the fabric to be nearly coeval with the Conquest, and thought some parts of it might be fragments of the Saxon monastery—perhaps that founded by Elfleda, the Lady of Mercia, who founded a monastic house in Bromborough about the year 912.

In 1828 this interesting piece of architecture was destroyed to make room for a new church, but this again became too small for the increasing population, and the present church was erected on land given by C. K. Mainwaring, Esq. Some of the original carved stones of the ancient church were discovered in taking down the church that this church replaced, and now form an inartistic pile in the rectory garden. Since writing these lines the stones have again been examined with the object of setting up the cross, portions of which are among the fragments, but it has been found to be too fragmentary, and the stones are to be moved to the shelter of the church, where they will meet the eye of visitors.

Bromborough Hall is a large house standing back from the main road, surrounded by trim

gardens, and sheltered by well-grown trees. The grounds slope to the river Mersey, over which they command some delightful prospects; but the building has been much altered by successive owners, and shows many styles of architecture. It is at present the seat of Sir William Forwood.

Bromborough has become in recent years a favourite place of residence for merchants engaged in business in Liverpool, and many large new houses have been built there. The population in 1831 was 313, and to-day it numbers 2000, or slightly over; and land has greatly enhanced in value, over £300 per acre having been recently asked for some favourably situated building land.

CHAPTER IV

EASTHAM

Soon after passing Bromborough Hall a stile path on the left leads over some well-farmed fields, pleasantly timbered, and delightful in spring when the sap is rising and the buds are showing and ready to burst into leaf in the morning's sunshine; or in autumn when the sad time of the year is approaching, and the autumnal tints are gilded by the evening sun. It is but a short walk across these fields, and the Eastham Wood is entered, one of the few natural woods remaining in Wirral open to the public to ramble in; and passing between the trees the pedestrian soon issues at the old Carlett, or Eastham Ferry, which was in the early coaching days the favourite route between Chester and Liverpool. Indeed, in those days Eastham inns must have been busy places, for as many as twenty coaches well filled with passengers passed through the village daily. After alighting from the coaches the serious part of the journey to Liverpool commenced, for when the stormy and wintry winds blew, the sailing boats often took half a day to

reach the Port of Liverpool, especially when the swiftly flowing incoming tide was against them.

Close to the ferry are the entrance locks to the Manchester Ship Canal, the largest of the three being 600 feet in length by 80 feet in width.

Passing by Carlett Park—the handsome mansion built by the late John Torr, Esq. (sometime Member of Parliament for Liverpool), and now occupied by his son, the Rev. W. E. Torr, Vicar of Eastham—some good timber will be observed in the park, which on one side touches the fringe of the Eastham Woods, which shelter it on the north. Eastham village is then entered. The interesting church, and the God's acre which surrounds it, at once invite an intimate attention, for time has softened the colouring of the red sandstone, and it contrasts strikingly with the bright greens and the pretty flowers which adorn the graves of the dear departed—

> "Your voiceless lips, O flowers, are living preachers,
> Each cup a pulpit, and each leaf a book."

The Manor of Eastham was given by Randal de Gernons, Earl of Chester, to the Convent of St. Werburgh, to make amends for some evil he had done it; and, in making the gift, he commanded all his subjects upon their allegiance that this his donation, given for his health and absolution, should be free and absolute, adding that if any of them should diminish it in anything, that God

would lessen him, so lessened destroy him, and, so destroyed, condemn him unto the Devil.

Entering beneath the fine lich-gate — presented by the late E. H. Harrison, Esq., who erected a fine house at Plymyard, built in the Elizabethan style—an ancient yew-tree will be noticed, which has looked on many centuries and bids fair to look on many more, although Father Time has nearly eaten its heart away, and the sap at each returning spring must flow with difficulty. Eastward of the church are two interesting tombstones—one erected to the memory of John Linford, a servant in the Stanley family for upwards of eighty years, and who died aged ninety-three years; the other to the memory of Margaret Turnbull, a servant in the Stanley family for upwards of sixty years, and who died aged eighty-one years. The record speaks well for both masters and servants.

The church is dedicated to St. Mary and was built about the year 1150. The handsome tower is ancient, the church having been restored in excellent taste and the windows filled with stained glass, some by Kemp. The nave and two side aisles are interesting, the west window being particularly beautiful. The north aisle terminates in a chancel, where rest the altar tombs of the Stanleys of Hooton.

On the top of the first is carved very deeply a large cross, and "William Standley of Houton

was buried heare the fourth of January the yeare of our Lord God 1612. Death restes in the ende. His wife was Anne Herbert, and left by her livinge one son, and six doughters. Death . . . Miseries."

The lid of the other altar tomb is supported by six pillars, and is inscribed: "Here lyeth the body of the honourable Charlotte lady Stanley, wife to sir William Stanley, of Hooton, bart., and daughter to the right honourable Richard lord Viscount Molyneux, who deceased the 31st day of July 1662. Requiescat in pace." And on a brass plate on the same tomb: "Here lyeth the body of sir Rowland Stanley of Hooton, knt., who deceased the 5th day of April a° 1613, and was here buried the 23d day of the same moneth in the yeare of his age 96."

On the panels of a pew in the north aisle are three ancient shields, carved in wood, with the arms of Poole, Buerton, and Capenhurst. The font is said to be Saxon or early Norman, and is of high interest.

Eastham is as pretty a village as is to be found in Cheshire, and close beside the church is an interesting old farm-house, a good specimen of the Cheshire half-timbered style, and a little further on there is a house inscribed "I.D.I.M.I. 1699," but the tablet was only found in the garden belonging to the house some few years ago, and has been but recently placed in its present posi-

tion. The view of the church tower from a little distance on the road to Willaston, with jackdaws encircling it, and swallows flitting on restless wings on a quiet summer evening, is a picture which remains in the memory, for its character is truly English.

In the centre of the village is a cross erected to the memory of the late J. A. Tobin, Esq., long resident in Eastham, and well remembered both in Cheshire and Liverpool as an excellent platform speaker. It is inscribed with the tenets he loved so well: "Fear God," "Honour the King," "Work while it is yet day," and is dated 1891.

The Stanley Arms has been entirely rebuilt since Nathaniel Hawthorne visited it in 1854. He was particularly struck with the English character of Eastham village, and writes: "After passing through the churchyard, we saw the village inn on the other side. The doors were fastened, but a girl peeped out of the window at us and let us in, ushering us into a very neat parlour. There was a cheerful fire in the grate, a straw carpet on the floor, a mahogany sideboard, and a mahogany table in the middle of the room; and on the walls the portraits of mine host (no doubt) and of his wife and daughters—a very nice parlour, and looking like what I might have found in a country tavern at home, only this was an ancient house, and there is nothing at home like the glimpse from the window of the

church and its red ivy-grown tower. I ordered some lunch, being waited on by the girl, who was neat, intelligent, and comely, and more respectful than a New England maid."

Altogether Eastham is a place to linger in and revisit from time to time. Other countries have their attractions without doubt, and

"Unto each his mother-beach, bloom and bird and land;"

but as an example of a quiet typical English village, Eastham will always dwell in the memory.

The dusty road sweeps through Eastham to Chester, but leaving by the road to the south-east, marked "Ellesmere Port," the motors are quickly out of sight and mind; for it is now possible to rest on the field gateways to look over the ever-changing scene, and proceeding in the leisurely fashion of the understanding pedestrian, in a little over a pleasant mile—where many a pause is necessary to listen to the birds, or note the numerous oak-trees which grow in goodly numbers and in shapely size in this neighbourhood—Hooton Hall, the ancient dwelling-place of the Stanleys for close on five hundred years, is reached.

William Webb, M.A., writing about 1621, says: "We come next to Hooton, a goodly ancient manor and fair park, which, ever since the reign of King Richard the Second, hath been the seat of the Stanleys of Hooton, gentlemen of great

dignity and worth, deriving their pedigree from Alan Silvester, upon whom Ranulph the first [fourth ?] Earl of Chester bestowed the bailiwick of the forest of Werral, and delivered unto him a horn, to be a token of his gift; from whence we gather, that Werral was holden to be a place of no mean account in those times; where have continued the same Stanleys in direct succession, and was lately possessed by a very worthy and noble-minded Knight, Sir Rowland Stanley, who lived there to the age (I have heard) of near one hundred years, and lived to be the oldest Knight in this land; which I note the rather to approve the healthfulness of the place, and where his fourth generation, his son's son's son was at the time of his decease. Near unto which stands Eastham, the parish church and lordship."

The Stanleys grew into an important family by their alliances with the leading families of Lancashire and Cheshire. Hooton was, in the reign of Richard I., in the possession of an ancient family named Hotone, and from them passed to Randle Walensis. In 1346 the right of the bailiwick of the Forest of Wirral and the Manor of Storeton was proved by Sir William Stanley, and upon the disafforestation of Wirral in 1360 a grant of 20 marks per annum was made to his son as a compensation for loss of fees and perquisites attached to that ancient office. This Sir William had two sons, the younger, Sir John

Stanley, married Isabella, sole heiress of Sir Thomas Lathom, Knight, and upon his death settled at Lathom, in Lancashire, and became founder of the noble and distinguished house of Derby.

The elder son married Margery, only daughter of William de Hoton, who brought to him the estates of her ancient family. The Stanleys were able men, and greatly respected. Indeed, Sir Rowland Stanley, who died in 1613, was beloved by the whole countryside, and lived to be the oldest knight in England, for he did not die until April 5, 1613, having lived to the great age of ninety-six years, and to see his son's son's son settled at Hooton.

Two of his sons are interesting—one on account of his great bravery, and the other on account of his treachery. The younger, Edward Stanley (a natural son), having proceeded to the wars in the Low Countries—for in those days natural sons got more kicks than halfpence—was a very gallant lad, and the Rev. F. Sanders, M.A., the learned Vicar of Hoylake, has recently drawn attention to the fact that one of his deeds of valour has been chronicled in the glowing pages of John Lothrop Motley, the American historian, in his famous book entitled a "History of the United Netherlands." He writes :—

"The great fortress which commanded the Velawe, and which was strong enough to have

resisted Count Hohenlo on a former occasion for nearly a year, was the scene of much hard fighting. It was gained at last by the signal valour of Edward Stanley, lieutenant to Sir William. That officer, at the commencement of an assault upon a not very practicable breach, sprang at the long pike of a Spanish soldier who was endeavouring to thrust him from the wall, and seized it with both hands. The Spaniard struggled to maintain his hold of the weapon, Stanley to wrest it from his grasp. A dozen other soldiers broke their pikes upon his cuirass, or shot at him with their muskets. Conspicuous by his dress, being all in yellow but his corslet, he was in full sight of Leicester and of five thousand men. The earth was so shifty and sandy that the soldiers who were to follow him were not able to climb the wall. Still Stanley grasped his adversary's pike, but, suddenly changing his plan, he allowed the Spaniard to lift him from the ground. Then, assisting himself with his feet against the wall, he, much to the astonishment of the spectators, scrambled quite over the parapet and dashed sword in hand amongst the defenders of the fort. Had he been endowed with a hundred lives it seemed impossible for him to escape death. But his followers, stimulated by his example, made ladders for themselves of each other's shoulders, scrambled at last with great exertions over the broken wall, overpowered the garrison, and made

themselves masters of the sconce. Leicester, transported with enthusiasm for this noble deed of daring, knighted Edward Stanley upon the spot, besides presenting him next day with £40 in gold, and an annuity of 100 marks sterling for life. 'Since I was born, I did never see any man behave himself as he did,' said the Earl. 'I shall never forget it, if I live a thousand years, and he shall have a part of my living for it as long as I live.'"

It makes the blood course quickly in the veins, and one's breath to come and go as the account of the gallant action of this Wirral gentleman is read. It was a brave deed that did not pass unrequited, and it is nearly impossible to look on the park, in which this brave soldier must have ridden as a boy, without recalling his gallant bearing, and murmuring, "It must have been a noble mother that bore so brave a son."

But, alas! as we sit beneath the oak-trees there come to mind the shame and misdeeds of the elder son, who, too, was a distinguished soldier. Leicester appointed Sir William Stanley Governor of Deventer, placing under his command more than a thousand troops. Leicester had seen a good deal of him, and trusted him implicitly, but his trust was betrayed shamefully, for within less than a month after his appointment he entered into negotiations to deliver the fortress into the hands of the

THE OLD HALL, HOOTON (demolished 1778)

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Spaniards, and enlisted in the service of the King of Spain. The great Spanish Armada set sail for England, and was happily defeated by the gallant Drake and his comrades, and, on learning of the defeat, Sir William retired into Spain and died abroad. His father, Sir Rowland Stanley, to show his detestation and abhorrence of his son's treacherous conduct, was particularly active against Spain, and when the news came of the Spanish Armada he contributed a hundred pounds to a fund for taking measures to repel it.

The old hall in which the Stanleys dwelt was a very interesting building, and a picture of it is reproduced here. Ormerod had it copied from the original painting in the possession of Sir T. S. M. Stanley, Bart., and describes it as "A very large quadrangular timber building, one of the rooms of which was decorated with rude paintings of the Earls of Chester executed on the wainscot. One side was occupied by a strong tower, embattled and machicolated, from which rose a slender turret of extraordinary height. It was erected by Sir William Stanley, who had for this purpose a licence enrolled in the exchequer of Chester, and dated 10 Aug. [3 not] 2 Henry VII." It was taken down in 1778, and the present mansion built from a design of Samuel Wyatt, from stone dug from Storeton quarry, stands within a park of one thousand acres.

At last there came a Sir William Stanley, who

entered into possession of the splendid and carefully kept estates of his ancestors, and a few short years of extravagant living led to the sale of Hooton. He entertained Napoleon III., who did not forget his kindnesses when misfortunes pressed heavily upon Sir William, who was reduced to sad circumstances by his liberality and gambling proclivities. An old rabbit-catcher, who dwelt on the estate many years ago, said that he had seen twelve coaches-and-four on a single day pass out of the Hooton Park gates taking Sir William's guests to the Chester races.

So at last the dwelling-place of the Stanleys, with all their fair demesne, came into the market and passed away with the Wirral Stanleys for ever.

"If we wish to do good to men, we must pity and not despise them," says Amiel, and whenever the writer of these lines looks over the park, and sees now a former dwelling of a historic family turned into a club, he exclaims, Oh! the pity of it, the pity of it.

The Stanley estates were purchased by Richard Christopher Naylor, a successful banker, and formerly a partner in the famous banking house of Leyland & Bullins, of King Street, Liverpool, who has long ceased to dwell there, although he made considerable additions to the original building. The park contains some good timber, and in the spring-time the large snowdrops peep

Hooton Hall—Present Day

Poole Hall, South Front

CHELSEA

through every glade, and there is a beautiful cedar-tree on the lawn at the west front, which is worthy of notice.

The hall commands excellent views over the Mersey, but the Manchester Ship Canal, which passes through the property where it slopes to the Mersey, has destroyed much of its rurality, and has been one of the means of destroying the ancient heronry which existed in the Booston woods; a few birds only occasionally visit their former breeding-place for nesting.

There is an annual race-meeting held within the park, at which there is always a large gathering of the Cheshire County families, and many of their sons race and ride their own horses. It is a pleasure to note how boldly and well they ride, and there are few better horsemen to be found in England than the Wirral gentlemen can produce.

CHAPTER V

POOLE HALL

Leaving Hooton and passing along the road which leads to Ellesmere, in about a mile a rough farm-road will be found running to the east; and, turning gladly from the hard high road, in a short quarter of a mile Poole Hall will be seen, and its position and architecture immediately arrest attention and call a halt, for it stands on the banks of the Mersey entirely alone. Its sixteenth-century builder had an eye for a situation, placing his house looking to the south-east and with a long south prospect, taking care to make his garden on the south side.

Poole Hall is a very fine specimen of Tudor architecture, and is one of the most important ancient buildings in Cheshire; for although it has been long used as a farm-house, it has had the good fortune to be occupied by tenants who have, with a few exceptions, kept it well, and been interested in its antiquity and historical association. It was built by Thomas Poole, who lived in the reign of King Henry VIII., and occupied many places of trust and importance in

Poole Hall

CHELSEA

Wirral, for he was Sheriff of Cheshire and seneschal of Birkenhead Priory at its dissolution. In the garden, partly covered with ivy, is a stone which at one time stood over the chimney-piece in the hall, on which is deeply cut "J.P. and K.P., 1574," showing that the house was altered, or perhaps partly rebuilt, at this date.

It is built of grey stone, timber, and plaster, with an octagonal turret at either end, the south front being lighted by large, heavily mullioned windows which look on to the old-fashioned garden, in which are good fruit-trees and an interesting sun-dial. A door on the south side leads directly into the dining-hall, which is finely panelled with oak. The principal entrance is on the east side, and under the embattled porch swings a great oak door, protected and strengthened with iron.

The writer was fortunate in finding a kindly cicerone in the person of Mr. Samuel Jones, the present occupier, and he will not readily forget the large and splendid kitchen in which he rested, with its oak beams, from which swung many flitches of home-cured bacon, nor his chat with his host by the fireside on a peevish April afternoon. A great ingle-nook formerly occupied one side, but it has given place to more modern and convenient arrangements, and a large up-to-date cooking range now partly fills it.

The stairs are formed of huge blocks of solid

oak, and a room upstairs is, like the dining-room, panelled throughout with oak in the Tudor style, whilst on the top storey, in the south-east turret, is a private chapel, in which one or two of the altar rails still exist. The view from the turret window over and up the Mersey, and on to the Overton Hills, is as good a prospect as is to be had in Wirral, and on a bright sunny day in spring one not readily forgotten.

In the clock-tower is the quaint clock, the face of which is on the east side of the house, and on the works is engraved "John Seddon, Frodsham, 1703." It had not worked for fifty years, but recently Mr. Samuel Jones met with a clock-maker who agreed to undertake its repair, a contract being made on the no-cure-no-pay system, with the result that the clock was duly set going, and now keeps excellent time. Adjoining the chapel is a little dark cell, and in another room, beneath the floor, is a secret hiding-place.

In the garden in front of the house stands a large and ancient mulberry-tree, whose branches spread themselves out close to the ground in many directions, quite covering and shading from the sun a pleasant garden-seat, and forming a natural arbour. Seated beneath the shade, and quite close to the principal entrance, it is possible to allow the fancy to roam and picture some of the members of this ancient family—who in the reign of Edward VI. held land in thirteen town-

ships in Wirral, besides some in Broxton—ride forth. Great, strenuous men they were, and not afraid to pay good blows. Ah! here comes the great Randall de Pull, who fought in the van of the English army under the command of the Black Prince, and who, under the immediate command of the Lord Audley at the battle of Poictiers, saw the great French army advance, and then fall back before the fierce hail of arrows which poured on them from the hedgerows which the Prince had lined with his bowmen; and on that stricken field doubtless witnessed the French King taken, fighting desperately, and his army, utterly broken, flying back to the gates of Poictiers, leaving 8000 of their number dead on the field.

Here comes Sir John hurrying away, in 1407, "to take into the Port of Chester such vessels and equipment as should be necessary to the said Sir John proceeding to sea for warlike purposes, according to the Prince's command"; or setting out to collect sixty archers to take into Ireland: for Wirral archers were famous, and none could escape training. There is a statute, 33 Henry VIII., which opens with a complaint of the decay of archery, and ordains that all men under the age of sixty, except spiritual men, justices, &c., shall use shooting with the long bow, and shall have bow and arrows ready continually in their house; every person having a man child in his

house shall provide a bow and two shafts for every such man child being seven years and upwards till of the age of thirteen, in order to promote shooting; and if the young men be servants the expense of such articles shall be abated from their wages.

Following him comes swaggering forth his kinsman, William the Rake, who, in "1436, went to Bewsey, near Warrington, with a great many servants, and forcibly carried off the Lady Isabel, widow of Sir John Boteler, late constable of Liverpool Castle, and most horribly ravished the said widow, carrying her into the most desolate parts of Wales."

Then the great Civil War bursts forth, and there are troublous times in store for the Pooles, who were staunch Cavaliers and good Catholics. Here comes limping James Poole to take the air, slowly dying from wounds received at the siege of Chester; and then on a sudden one hears the tramp and shouts of the Parliamentary forces under Sir William Moreton, as they take and pillage Poole Hall.

The hall was formerly surrounded by a moat, of which no traces now remain.

In 1844 a quantity of arms, swords, and pistols were dug up in grounds adjacent to the hall, where they were probably buried when it was taken by Sir William Moreton and his Parliamentary forces.

The view from the east porch, over the upper reaches of the Mersey, is partly obscured by the huge Mount Manistay, a great hill thrown up when the ship canal was excavated. It is now grassed over, and occasionally partridges are shot on its slopes.

The baronetcy remained in the family until the death of the Rev. Sir Henry Poole in 1821, and the farm of 350 acres now forms part of the Hooton Hall estate, having passed by purchase to the late Richard C. Naylor, Esq.

Returning to the main road, in less than a mile is Overpool, which must have been a poor place in 1847, for Mortimer describes it in uncomplimentary terms, saying, "The village, if such it may be called, consists of a few poor huts and small farm-houses situated near the shore of the Mersey, on an almost impassable cross-road from Eastham." But the scene has changed in recent years, and the houses have been mostly rebuilt, so that the village has an air of decent comfort, and the road is quite hard and good. At the entrance to the village a tiny Wesleyan chapel will be noticed on the left, and by it a finger-post marking a path over the fields to Ellesmere. It is always wise to walk away from the main roads if time is not an object, and the traveller is in search of scenery. In this case he is rewarded by saving time and getting excellent scenery, for on passing two tumble-down and happily unin-

habited cottages—a specimen, no doubt, of what the village consisted when Mortimer saw it in 1847—the fields are entered, and it is necessary to pause often for the view. To the north-east stands Poole Hall in its solitary situation, and in front is the Mersey, with the prettily wooded shore on the Lancashire side. In a little under a mile the busy little port of Ellesmere is reached, with its huge elevator, corn mills, and other manufactories, and passing quickly through the town by Bridge Street to Pontoon, a boat will be found waiting (if the precaution has been taken to send a post-card a few days in advance to Thomas Ryder, Stanlaw Point,[1] near Ellesmere Port) for Stanlaw Point, on which is situated the ruins of the ancient abbey, is now an island, cut off from the mainland by the Manchester Ship Canal, which has to be crossed. No boats are kept at Ellesmere for the purpose, and the writer of these lines, on his first visit, had to steal a boat which some sailors had left at Pontoon whilst they made purchases in the town, and bribed two stalwart youths to enter the conspiracy with him. Luckily, the boat was safely moored again before the sailors returned.

Landing on the island, the farm and ruins of the abbey are in front, and the prospect is a pleasing one, showing how greatly for the better the hand of man has changed the scene since Ormerod saw it and described it. "It is," he

[1] Stanlaw, now marked on Ordnance Survey Stanlow.

Farm and Site of Stanlaw Abbey

says, "difficult to select a scene of more comfortless desolation than this cheerless marsh barely fenced from the waters by embankments on the north, shut out by naked knolls from the fair country which spreads along the feet of the forest hills on the south-east, and approached by one miserable trackway of mud, whilst every road that leads to the haunts of men seems to diverge its course as it approaches Stanlaw." Nothing like this scene will be noticed now, for though the Point itself is bleak and dreary enough, on nearly every side the prospect is a pleasing one; the great fens and marshes in the neighbourhood of Ince, at one time stretching for many weary miles, have been drained, are well farmed, and dotted with prosperous-looking homesteads, whilst in the foreground is Ince Hall. The Mersey here takes a wide sweep to the south-west, so that at high tide the river Gowy seems to fall into a beautiful lake, and the view over to the prettily wooded shores on the Lancashire side at Speke and Hale forms a pleasing prospect; to the north-west is the Mount Manistay, happily now nearly all green with vegetation. When the tide is out the mud flats are tenanted by numerous sheldrakes—or, as the Wirral people call them, burrow-ducks, on account of their nesting in the rabbit burrows—whilst wild geese and other water-fowl are scattered over the mud flats, and in the winter the place is visited by numerous swans.

There is a small rabbit-warren on the island, and numerous well-bred goats pick up a hard living.

The rock on which the abbey was situated is of red sandstone, and the position is a bleak one—blown on by every wind of heaven; and before the surrounding country was fenced and drained it is impossible to imagine a more uninviting situation, for the rocky knoll was surrounded on three sides by great gloomy marshes and sour bad lands, over which the traveller must have trod a precarious path, with many a will-o'-the-wisp to dog and betray his footsteps, for the marsh was obscured by tall reeds, valuable for thatching; and the founder of the abbey in the charter directed that the reeds were not to be gathered without the express permission of the convent.

It was on this bleak spot, where the river Gowy fell into the Mersey after dragging itself slowly and painfully through the dreary marshes, that John de Lacy, Constable of Chester, founded this abbey of Cistercian monks in the year 1178, shortly before he set out for a crusade in the Holy Land, never, alas! to return. The Cistercian monks were a very austere order, choosing lonely situations, difficult of access, and far away from the busy haunts of men. Their peculiar system was the work of Stephen Harding, an Englishman, and although the first abbey was founded by William Gifford, bishop of Winchester, at Waverley, A.D. 1129, yet so much did

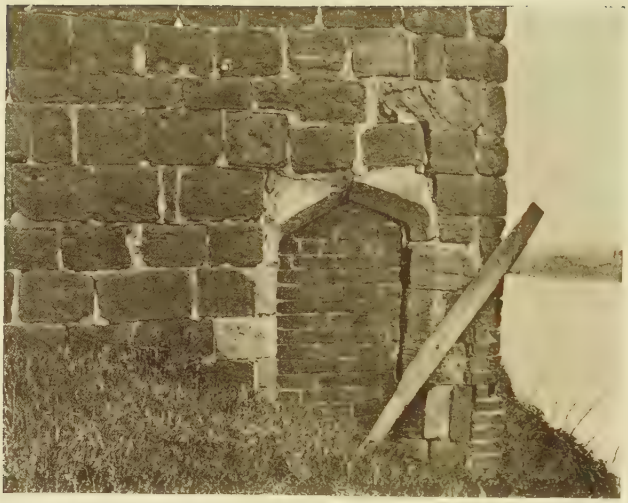
the monks commend themselves to the people of England that rich endowments flowed in upon them, so that their establishments in England in the reign of Henry VIII. numbered seventy-five. They were great agriculturists and promoters of Gothic architecture, numbering among their beautiful buildings such noble monuments to their skill as the Abbeys of Woburn, Tintern, Furness, and Fountains.

So here the good Cistercians dwelt, toiling for the good of men's souls, and endeavouring to leave the world a little better than they found it. Their isolation was complete, and the busy strife of those noisy days of turmoil and war passed by them unheard and unheeded; but the situation was an ill-chosen one, for the place was liable to floods when the Gowy came tumbling down in fury, and the Mersey rose before the gathering storms. A great eruption of the sea in 1279 is stated by the Annals of St. Werburgh to have done immense damage at Stanlaw; and alas! troubles come not singly but in battalions, for a belching gale damaged the great and beautiful tower of their church, so that it fell, carrying with it part of the surrounding masonry, and almost ruining the abbey as a place of abode. Yet the monks clung tenaciously to the hallowed spot, to which came pious pilgrims, for it held the bones of the illustrious dead, the great Earls of Lincoln and the Constables of Chester

lying buried therein in a vault cut out of the solid rock.

In another two years the surrounding marshes were lighted by a great fire, for what remained of the abbey was ablaze, and the place was reduced in a great conflagration. Still the monks clung to the little that remained of their beautiful building; but ere long another inundation occurred, and the inmates were in a piteous plight, for the water rose three feet high in the offices of the monastery, so that at last the monks of Stanlaw requested leave of Pope Nicholas IV. to migrate to Whalley, where they had received rich grants of land from the De Lacys, and at last their request was granted on their increasing their number by twenty.

"Considerable difficulty," Mortimer says, "attended their removal, which was opposed by parties who pleaded a prior grant of Whalley, and were only induced to relinquish their claim upon the promise of several large sums of money. Even their own patron opposed their movements. He resumed possession of the church he had given them, and retained it until they assigned to him their chapel at Clitheroe, then valued at one hundred marks. At length, in 1294, the separation finally took place. Five of the monks remained at Stanlaw, one at the Grange of Stanney, and one was transferred to finish his studies at Oxford, where he attained a doctor's



Ancient Doorway, Stanlaw Abbey

Subterranean Passage, Stanlaw Abbey

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degree. The twenty-five that removed to Whalley obtained entrance into the church, 'having read their forced revocation before the doors, the people in crowds invoking the judgements of Heaven upon the simoniacs,' by whom they had been so long excluded."

Robert Hauworthe, who had been Abbot for twenty-four years, and had learned to look with affectionate eyes on the great marsh lands, with its reed gatherers, decided to remain at Stanlaw with four of his monks, much to the relief of the dwellers on the country-side, for the removal of the monks to Whalley was bitterly felt, and great efforts were made to rekindle the enthusiasm of the people for the abbey, an indulgence of forty days being given to all who aided it by contributions, and another of a less number of days, "to all who should either go to Stanlaw to pray for the souls of the Earls of Lincoln, and the Constables of Chester there buried." Its distresses even excited commiseration on the Continent. The Archbishop of Montroyal and the Bishop of Versailles granted similar indulgences to all who would undertake a pilgrimage to pray for the soul of Edmond De Lacy.

So the monks remained faithful to their beloved Stanlaw, which became a cell under Whalley until the dissolution, when it passed into the possession of that great trafficker in

lands, Sir Richard Cotton, and was sold by him to Sir John Poole of Poole Hall.

But little of the former splendour of Stanlaw Abbey remains; scattered about are various stones, which have been carefully carved, and four beautiful old circular columns now support the roof of a cow-house. One of the walls, in which is an ancient doorway, is still standing, and in the centre of the farm-yard is a subterranean passage, hewn out of the solid red sandstone, passing under the buildings and emerging over 45 yards, close to where the Gowy falls into the Mersey. Another passage, which, however, the present writer did not succeed in finding, is said by Ormerod to have led to a small circular apartment, hewn also out of the solid rock, which was not discovered until a furious storm burst in upon it, and laid bare the chamber containing numerous bones and several leaden coffins. At the present day bones are still found when gardening operations are in progress, showing that Stanlaw was a favourite place of burial, and that a considerable God's acre was attached to the abbey.

From what remains, the style of architecture is judged to be extremely fine Early English, and although of no great size, the building must have been a very beautiful specimen of the architecture of that period.

The present farm-buildings, in which are in-

THROUGH EASTERN WIRRAL—THE SHIP CANAL

CHELSEA

corporated portions of the abbey, were erected about 1750, and are now fast falling into decay, for the house is occupied by a fisherman and a wild-fowler, to whom the great out-buildings are useless.

As we move quietly away to the boat, to be rowed across the ship canal, the buried past, in which we have been dwelling, and in fancy almost hearing the great bell in the tower calling the faithful to evensong from across the marshes, is on a sudden forgotten, as a steamer hurries swiftly along the ship canal on its voyage through Eastern Wirral to the great ocean beyond, and spells for us the great change that has occurred in our habits, thoughts, and life, since the good Cistercian monks held sway at Stanlaw.

CHAPTER VI

STOKE IN 1816

It was as fine a May morning as a man might wish to breathe upon when Ellesmere Port was left behind and the road to Whitby stretched ahead, and I went whistling on my way to Stoke. How different the prospect was from the expected, for Ormerod had been read and digested. He dwelt in this neighbourhood, and therefore wrote about it with an understanding mind, and he is such a trustworthy historian that, when he describes a place, one instantly views it through his eyes, forgetting that nearly a century has closed since his book appeared. Listen how sourly he writes of Stoke, whither our footsteps are leading us. "The village is (1816) a collection of ragged, filthy hovels, scattered round the church without the least attention to arrangement, on a small elevation adjacent to the marshes through which the Gowy forces its way to a confluence with the Mersey. Of the roads it may be sufficient to say that they are not worse than could be expected, after stating that the soil is deep clay, that materials are distant, the land-

lord an absentee, and the tenants of a description peculiarly apt to neglect their duty in this respect under a strong stimulus and more favourable circumstances." After first reading this description it was with a heavy heart that the writer of these lines set out for Stoke, and his delight at the altered circumstances of the country-side, the people, and their habitations may be easily imagined, for in many ways it is one of the fairest parts of the peninsula.

At Stanlaw we stand at the eastern boundary of Wirral, and the deep valley which forms the southern boundary of the Hundred has to be entered, through which the Shropshire Union Canal has been cut, so that it is possible, by making friends with a bargeman, to traverse southern Wirral by water ; and a pretty inland voyage it is, along and by prosperous farm-houses and through meadows filled with well-bred cattle.

The road runs from Ellesmere by Whitby, once a pleasant pretty village, and not yet shorn of all its beauty, though new buildings are creeping up to it, and it can now boast of a steam laundry, where the residents of Ellesmere get their linen washed. But once past Whitby the road stretches through a charming, well-timbered country, for it is a rich, warm valley, pleasant in the spring-time, when the violets peep through the hedgerows and the belching winds of March go roaring over the tree-tops and blow the rooks

across the sky; or in May, when the apple- and pear-trees are in bloom; or in autumn, when the trees stand partly leafless against the golden evening sky.

The physical geography of this valley is said to have been greatly altered, and the Mersey is considered at one time to have flowed through it to mingle its waters with the Dee, whence they flowed together to the sea; but it is a theory which I can neither confirm nor dispute.

It is but a few miles to Little Stanney, a charming old Cheshire village where well-to-do farmers reside, with orchards about their houses; and in May, when the fruit-trees are in full blossom, it is a sight not readily forgotten and worth pausing to view from some coign of vantage, and listen to the music the village blacksmith beats from his anvil.

In the reign of Richard I. the Bunburys dwelt here in Stanney Old Hall, which has unfortunately entirely disappeared, its site being at present occupied by a substantial farm-house, still called Stanney Hall, having in certain portions of the grounds faint traces of the moat which surrounded the ancient seat of the Bunburys. The old hall was still standing when Ormerod wrote, and he says: "It was built of timber and surrounded by enormous barns, apparently of the same age with the rest of the fabric, the whole being encompassed by a moat." Some parts of this building

were considered as old as the time of Henry V. An act of vandalism took place, and the building was taken down by order of an agent, the wood-work and panelling being sold to the village blacksmith, who, in this case, secured a great bargain, for in breaking up the old beams for firewood a large parcel of gold coins was found concealed in one of them, the money having probably been placed there for safety during the troubles of the Civil War. However, the finding of the hidden treasure became noised abroad, and in the end poor Vulcan had to repay a sum of nearly one hundred pounds.

A little further is Stoke, another pretty out-of-the-world village, which in May displays a wealth of fruit-blossom, and where, if you arrive with a pang of healthful hunger, you may take your ease in the tiny little Bunbury Arms Inn whilst they prepare you a meal.

William Webb, who visited Stoke in the seventeenth century, says: "From thence we come to Stoke, a little parish church adjoining to that fair demesne and ancient seat of the Bunburies, of good worship, called Stanney-Hall, and which may be glad of the worthy present owner, Sir Henry Bunbury, knight, whose grave and well-disposed courses procure unto him a special good estimation, for his endeavours to do good in public government, and his more private affairs also."

The Bunbury family can point to one ancestor,

at least, who was a great warrior, for Sir Roger de Bunbury was a commander in the first wars of Edward III., who, it is stated, added the chess-rooks to the plain bend of the paternal coat, in compliment to his skill as a tactician.

The Bunburys have long ceased to reside in Cheshire, but two of their descendants are interesting men. Sir Henry Bunbury, Bart., a soldier and historian who distinguished himself at the battle of Maida, 1806; he was a pioneer of the Volunteer Movement, and in 1815 conveyed to Napoleon his sentence of deportation to St. Helena. His father, Henry William Bunbury, is interesting on account of his skill as an artist and amateur caricaturist, his "Academy for Grown Horsemen" being very clever and spirited, and calling forth the high praise of Sir Joshua Reynolds. His wit, perhaps, appears slightly dull to the present age, and his burlesque drawings a little gross; but many a countryman still smiles, as he drinks his glass of ale, at the broad fun of Bunbury which decorates the walls of the inn.

The church is interesting mainly on account of the monuments to the Bunbury family, which cover a period of nearly two hundred years, the walls of the north and south transepts being hung with their hatchments, some of which are cleverly painted, and are said to have been executed by the famous herald, Randle Holme, and the chancel window is filled with richly

Stoke Church

ELSEA

stained glass, in which are the arms of the Bunburys. When Ormerod visited the church it was a picturesque building, and from the fragments of the architecture he decided it to be nearly coeval with the Conquest; and at the west end was a wooden belfry, which was then in a very dangerous state of dilapidation. The church was partly rebuilt in 1827, and is of red sandstone, embosomed in fine old trees, which looked on the ancient building, and have weathered the storms of centuries. In the churchyard is an interesting old sun-dial, and the church tower holds a peal of bells, all of which are dated and have inscriptions :—

"1617. Gloria in excelsis Deo."
"1642. God save his church."
"1661. God save his church. Our King and Realm."

Retracing our steps to Little Stanney, and passing the blacksmith's shop, Rake Hall will be found on the left-hand side of the road. The building has been partly modernised, and is now a private residence. When the old hall at Stanney fell into decay the Bunburys took up their residence at this more modern house, which, in a moment of conviviality, was named Rake Hall. The origin of the name was recorded on a pane of glass which, in Ormerod's day, was fixed in the kitchen window. It was dated December 15, 1724, and inscribed with the names of the

guests then present; evidently there was a convivial gathering of Cheshire gentlemen, for among the guests were Sir Charles Bunbury, Sir R. Grosvenor, Sir W. Stanley, Sir Francis Poole, and other well-known Cheshire names. Despite the story of the pane of glass, it is much more likely that the hall took its name on account of it being close to, or on the road, for a rake means a lane, or road.

The road leads, with many a bend, through the farm lands, where stalwart ploughmen trudge their weary way, to Chorlton, where the Barons of Dunham were probably lords soon after the Conquest. Chorlton Hall is a large stone building, and the architect had an eye for a situation, placing his hall in an elevated position commanding pleasing and extensive views of the Cheshire hills. The district is nicely wooded, and lies safely away from traffic, but if for no other reason it always attracts the present writer because it was formerly the home of George Ormerod, LL.D., F.R.S., F.S.A., the great and learned historian of Cheshire, whose work is so often quoted in these pages, and to which he gave up nine years of his life, completing his book in his thirty-fourth year. He spent his summers in this house and his winters in London, examining and referring to historical documents to be used in his work, in which he has without doubt raised to himself a great and

CHORLTON HALL

enduring monument. No trouble was too great, no distance too long, and no researches too arduous, which would throw the smallest light on a historical point connected with his subject, and it is truly said of this great work "that for literary merit it stands unsurpassed; and for a knowledge of the very foundations of the law of real property, so essential to such a work, its author takes very high rank."

Mr. Ormerod sold the whole of his estate in this manor in 1823 to Richard Wicksted for the sum of eight thousand pounds, and died at his residence, Sedbury Park, Gloucestershire, aged eighty-eight. It may be well said of him, as he said of Sir Peter Leycester, "It only remains to repeat every praise that can be due to the natural ability of that historian who, to indefatigable perseverance in searching after truth, united honesty and fearlessness in uttering it."

From Chorlton it is a nice walk to Backford, which is nearly four miles outside Chester walls. The church is on an eminence hard by the road, and is dedicated to St. Oswald, but has been partly rebuilt within recent years, and, except the tower, little of the ancient building remains. It possesses a chained Bible printed by Robert Barker, and dated London, 1617, but it is badly imperfect.

About 1570 the Birkenheads resided here, having purchased the estates from Thomas Aldersey, and they continued in possession until

the family became extinct in male heirs in 1724, on the death of Thomas Birkenhead.

One member of this Wirral family became famous—Sir John Birkenhead—who, during the Civil War, was editor of *Mercurius Aulicus*, or the *Court Mercury*, the vehicle of communication between the Court at Oxford and the remainder of the kingdom. Sir John excelled in satirical wit, and did not spare his opponents, for he seems to have possessed a genuine power of ridicule, his wit having been compared with that of Butler.

The road goes still downhill to Lea, where William Webb arrived in the seventeenth century, and found "a fair house and fine demesne, so called, and hath been the mansion for some descents of the Glaziers, Esquires of special note, and good account;" but their old hall has now entirely disappeared.

Perhaps the Glaziers did not deserve this eulogium, for they are said to have been Manxmen, who were allured to England by the prospect of participating in the revenues of the dissolved monasteries.

The manor of Lea was part of the endowment of the monastery of St. Werburgh, but in the thirteenth century a great deal of the land was appropriated by the master, or chief cook of the abbot, an hereditary office, by virtue of which the cook was entitled to certain per-

Mollington Hall

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quisites of, and in, the kitchen, "together with eight bovates of land in the neighbouring township of Huntingdon, which, in the abbacy of William de Marmion, 1226 to 1228, were exchanged for an equal quantity of land in Lea and Newton." Evidently it was worth while being a chief cook to the abbots of those days, and assuredly the abbots did not believe that "God sends meat and the devil sends cooks."

From Lea it is a pretty walk to Mollington, which is mentioned in the Domesday Book under the name of Molintone as being held by Robert de Rodelent, the Norman baron of Rhuddlan, who was the friend and General-in-Chief of the forces of the great Hugh Lupus, to whom, says Pennant, "the Conqueror delegated a fulness of power, made his a county Palatine, and gave it such sovereign jurisdiction, that the ancient Earls kept their own parliament, and had their own courts of law, in which any offence against the dignity of the sword of Chester was as cognizable as the like offence would have been at Westminster against the dignity of the royal crown." Robert de Rodelent pursued the Welsh remorselessly, and, taking Rhuddlan, he restored and partly rebuilt Rhuddlan Castle. He is described as "a valiant and active soldier, eloquent, liberal, and commendable for many virtues, but of stern countenance." At last the Welsh had their revenge, for, on the 3rd of July 1088,

they caught him accompanied by a single soldier. He was not the man to run away, and, drawing his sword, stood ready to defend himself to the last ; but none of the Welsh dared approach him with their swords, so they brought up their bowmen, and he fell at last "beneath a shower of arrows."

Mollington Hall lies hidden from the road by a belt of trees, and is surrounded by a high brick wall, which ensures the occupants privacy from the public gaze, except when some wayfarer eludes the gardeners in order to have a good look at the handsome and spacious mansion, which stands on a slight elevation, and is built of red brick, which time has softened in colour. It is sheltered by trees from the north and east winds, and overlooks pretty gardens which slope to the park, in which is a chain of ornamental lakes, on which congregate numerous wild-fowl. Tradition says that it was the cackling of geese that saved Rome ; but it is quite certain that those watchful birds came near to betraying the presence of the writer as he lay by the margins of the lake, making him wish he had had the good sense to go to the hall, and ask for permission to see the gardens. Verily "the curiosity of knowing things has been given to man for a scourge."

At Mollington it is best to leave Wirral and enter the precincts of Chester to reach

Blacon Point

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Blacon, and, turning down Chester Street, it is but a nice walk of less than a mile on the Parkgate Road, when on the brow of the hill, a cinder walk marked private will be found running over the fields, and pursuing this for a short distance, you will find yourself on Blacon Point, on which is situated a large farm with good out-buildings. Blacon House, which is adjacent, looks over to Chester, the high and precipitous point on which it stands being now prettily wooded, but in former years the point formed one of the boundaries of the Dee, which spread itself out to the city walls. Now the engineer has set the river a course, and it is not free to stray to Blacon Point; but it is easy to understand that in the early period of its history the banks were well wooded as far as Hilbre, so that it need not then have been a difficult task for the squirrels to skip from tree to tree, as we are told they did in the ancient rhyme. The view of Chester from this point is a pleasing one, for the houses appear to cling about the cathedral, which, overtopping all other buildings, dominates the situation, and draws upon itself the eager gaze of those who know good architecture.

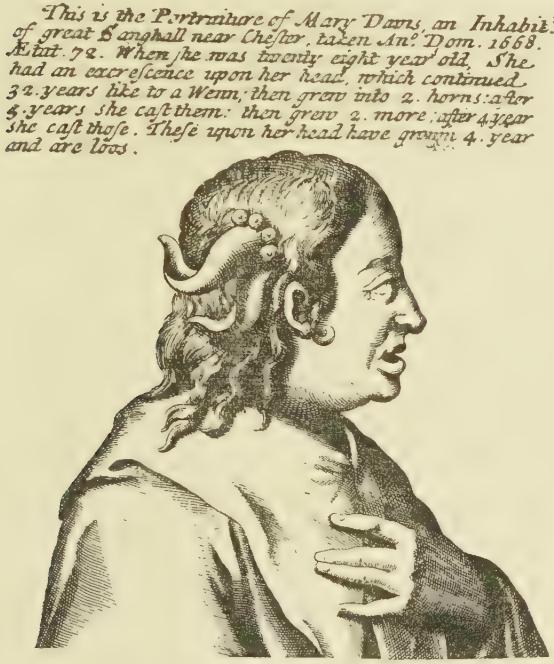
Returning to the road, which now enters a pretty stretch of country, with hedgerows full of wild flowers, and here and there a patch or two of gorse, and in May, when the horse-chestnut trees are in flower, it is well worth walking

slowly to Great Saughall, where the village inn is named "The Swinging Gate," and attached to a tree is a model of a gate with the following verse below it:—

"This gate hangs well,
It hinders none,
Refresh and pay,
Then travel on."

For those who have looked into that old and neglected book, Leigh's "Natural History of Lancashire," it is impossible to pass through Saughall without in fancy seeing poor Mrs. Mary Davies coming up the road to her cares, and doing her best, poor soul, to hide the horrible horns which grew from her head. She had an excrescence on her head for upwards of thirty years, and when she was sixty years old "it changed into horns, in show and substance much like rams' horns, solid and wrinkled, but sadly grieving the old woman, especially upon change of weather." So curious a sight at last became noised beyond Cheshire, and Mrs. Mary Davies was taken to London and exhibited at the Signe of the Swanne, near Charing Cross. In the British Museum is a rare pamphlet entitled, "A Brief Narrative of a strange and wonderful old woman, that hath a pair of horns growing upon her head: giving an account of how they have several times, after being shed, grown again: declaring the place of her birth, her education

and her conversation, with the first occasion of their growth, the time of their continuance and


This is the Portriture of Mary Davis an Inhabit.nt
of great Sanghall near Chester, taken Anº Dom. 1668.
Aetat. 72. When she was twenty eight year old. She
had an excrescence upon her head, which continued
32. years like to a Wenn, then grew into 2. horns: after
5. years she cast them: then grew 2. more: after 4 year
she cast those. These upon her head have grown 4. year
and are loos.

where she is now to be seen, namely, at the Signe of the Swanne, near Charing Cross.

> You that love wonders to behold,
> Here you may of a wonder rede,
> The strangest that was ever seen or told,
> A woman with horns upon her head.

London: printed by T. S., 1676." In the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, there is a portrait of

this poor afflicted woman taken in her seventy-second year, where is also preserved one of the horns. Mrs. Mary Davies lived to a great age, and was exhibited in London in her eighty-first year.

Here, again, it is hardly possible to understand how Ormerod could describe Great Saughall in the following terms:—"With the exception of one or two buildings of a more decent appearance, it is an assemblage of ill-arranged and squalid huts of the most neglected and comfortless appearance." These are hard and biting words, and, it may be added, after making due allowance for the improvement of nearly a century, an over-painted picture. Ormerod seems to have lacked a trick of gaiety, and constantly dips his pen very deeply in gall when writing about the villages of Wirral.

Passing through Great Saughall, a road will be found on the left marked "To Shotwick Park," and, turning along it, you are on a private road where the motor cannot follow, so that you may enjoy yourself, and lie out on the sunny side of the hedges and be certain of not finding the remains of a picnic. And so in studied leisure you issue into the open road, and, turning to the left, soon join the great high road to Queen's Ferry, which hurry along, for it is sometimes crawling with motors, then turn to the left and go down to Shotwick. How long will this walk

take you? I am sure I cannot tell you. Get a map and measure the distance for yourself. Take your lunch with you, and don't take a watch, and you will be there when you arrive. That is the only way to enjoy this walk.

CHAPTER VII

SHOTWICK

It is impossible to stand meditating beneath the trees at Shotwick without feeling the buried past arise before the mind's eye in a great pageant. To most Wirral men this village has a peculiar interest, for it was in former times the most important place in the Hundred, and it was there that some of the great warriors of England came, and where the gentlemen of Cheshire assembled their armed men to embark for Ireland. In the thirteenth century, before the Dee had silted up and changed its course, Shotwick was an important port, and many a company of Wirral archers under the Stanleys, the Pooles, and others assembled here to be taken to Ireland.

In 1256 the Welsh rose in rebellion and forced their way to Chester, plundering and devastating the country-side, and in the following year the Earl of Chester had to retire before two bodies numbering 30,000 each. The barons, assembled at Shotwick, induced the king to help them as their situation was becoming desperate, provisions being scarce, for, like other parts of England,

Shotwick Hall

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Wirral was suffering from famine, and wheat had risen from 2s. the quarter to 15s., and even 20s. This seems a small price when compared with that of wheat to-day, but it must be remembered that money had a greater purchasing power in those days, and the price put this necessity of life beyond the reach of most.

What a busy place Shotwick must have been in the thirteenth century when compared with the sleepy little village it is now. Fancy the great barons assembled there with their retinues, the street ringing to the tramp of armed men marching with warlike bustle, and in the mornings the famous Wirral archers at practice with their long bows, sending the great grey-goose shafts fleeting through the still air, singing in their flight like huge hornets as they found their way to the targets. It was a law that a butt should be erected in every township, and the inhabitants were obliged to practice at them on Sundays and holy days, and were liable to a fine for not doing so.

In 1280 the most important man in England, and one of the wisest, most illustrious, and greatest warriors who has ever occupied a throne, visited Shotwick, for in September of that year King Edward I., to whose wise statesmanship we owe our Parliament, was in Shotwick, and spent September 5, 15, 16, and 17 of that year there on his way to and from Rhuddlan and Flint. He

had been in the neighbourhood previously, for he personally superintended the building of Flint Castle, and employed Richard Ingeniator, of Chester, as his principal engineer.

But gradually the Dee silted up, and Shotwick was left high and dry, the population moving away to more prosperous places in Wirral to the north, for Neston and Parkgate, Dawpool and West Kirby gradually became the ports—especially Parkgate, which was in constant use to embark and disembark troops and merchandise to and from Ireland. So Shotwick stands on the fringe of the marshes, and a very small fringe it is, for the Dee has been set a course, and much useful land reclaimed which fifty years ago was the home of numerous wild-fowl, who secured good feeding on the great marsh. The writer's father once found himself in difficulties there on a bleak wintry day when he had been out wild-fowling, and had been too intent on the ducks to notice that the rising tide was rapidly surrounding him. Now sheep and cattle feed where the wild-fowl used to breed.

The family of Shotwicke came to an end when Alice de Shotwicke conveyed the manor away by her marriage to Richard de Hockenhull, in the reign of Edward I.; and in the reign of Henry VII. Richard de Hockenhull claimed the rights of fishing in the parts of the Dee which flowed past his manor, excepting "the dainty

Shotwick Church

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Interior of Shotwick Church

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bits, the whalle, sturgion, and thorlehede," which he was ordered to reserve for the use of the Earl at Chester Castle.

The manor was held by the Hockenhulls until 1715, when, owing to debts, they sold it to the Bennetts of Chester.

The church, which is dedicated to St. Michael, is of the greatest interest, and, although rebuilt in the fifteenth century, is of a very remote foundation, possibly Anglo-Saxon. The south doorway is particularly interesting.

At the west end of the aisle is a very curious old square churchwarden's pew, over which is a canopy of oak on which is carved "Robert Coxon, James Gilbert, 1709," and on the pew is deeply cut the names of Henry Gowin and William Huntington, church-wardens, 1673. There is, too, a clerk's desk, reading-desk, and pulpit of the ancient "three-decker" form. The windows were doubtless at one time richly decorated with stained glass, of which, however, only a few fragments remain.

It is pleasant to find some name honoured in literature connected with Shotwick, and the name of the Rev. Samuel Clarke, who was the Vicar of Shotwick for five years, must not be passed unrecorded. He was an industrious writer, producing many works, excellent in their day and still referred to, and he must have turned over a prodigious number of volumes to accumulate such

a mass of anecdote as is to be found in the "Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Latter Age." He was a most upright and conscientious gentleman, and feeling he could not take the *et cetera* oath, refused it, and drew up a petition on the subject, which he presented to the King. About 1662 he was ejected from the Church of England for nonconformity, but remained to the end warmly attached to its doctrine.

The site of the ancient and formidable Castle of Shotwick stands on the verge of the boundaries of Cheshire and Flintshire, immediately below the farm called Shotwick Lodge, which is one of the largest farms in the Hundred of Wirral, over 420 acres being highly cultivated. The foundations, now grassy knolls, command a pleasing prospect, and the deep moat which surrounds the knolls is distinctly traceable, although even in Webb's day the castle was a desolate ruin, for he writes: "That gallant park, called Shotwick Park, where sometimes have been, and yet are remaining, the ruins of a fair castle upon the brink of the Dee, within the park, in which is also a fine lodge for the habitation of the keepers of the Prince's Highness deer in that park." But here now are only to be found prosperous farms, in the out-buildings of some of which are to be seen ancient worked stones.

Shotwick Hall, a little to the north-east of the church, is an interesting specimen of the dwellings

SITE OF SHOTWICK CASTLE

good-tempered-looking fellow, looked askance at me, as though he saw in me a possible poacher. But I spoke to him in the friendly manner of the man of the road, and straightway we fell to talking, and I got much useful information, learning among other matters that his wages were eighteen shillings a week, out of which he supported, in great respectability and comparative comfort, a wife and several children.

Once across the fields the road leads to the little village of Puddington, past Puddington Hall, and in a few moments you are standing by Puddington Old Hall, now re-built with taste, what remains of the old building being recased. In former years the house was surrounded by a deep moat, part of which remains, but instead of containing water it is planted with pretty flowering shrubs. The interesting old drawbridge was standing less than a hundred years ago, and although time has changed the building and obliterated much of its historic interest, time can never obliterate the interest with which the family of Massey has surrounded the site of their ancient home. They were warriors all, and donned their harness as easily as they drew their breath, and if there was a company of bowmen to be trained and sent anywhere, as sure as fate there was a Massey to lead them on, and ensure their victory.

Richard Massey, a younger brother of Hamon,

PUDDINGTON OLD HALL

the fifth baron of Dunham, settled here early in the thirteenth century, and Sir John Massey, seneschal to Elizabeth, Countess of Salisbury, was a warrior of reputation in the fourteenth century, and a great figure in the French wars.

The Masseys, like the Stanleys and the Pooles, were zealous Catholics, and William Massey, the last heir male of the line, is perhaps the most interesting figure in Wirral history. He was a happy bachelor, and so zealous for his faith that he nearly came to blows with Sir Thomas Grosvenor, who was a staunch Protestant, for corresponding with his wife on religious matters. Bishop Cartwright has the following entry in his diary respecting this matter :—"Mr. Massey dined with me, and after supper Mr. Massey came to me again, and discoursed with me concerning poor Sir Thomas Grosvenor's carriage to his wife, and her resolution to enter into a monastery if he did not alter speedily, and consult her reputation and his own better than he did." It is impossible not to sympathise with Sir Thomas Grosvenor's objection to his wife corresponding so frequently with the happy and well-favoured bachelor at Puddington.

But trouble was brewing for the zealous Massey, who, when the news came of the secret meetings in favour of the Pretender, like

most of the leading Roman Catholic families, hailed his coming with a delight born of the persecutions to which their families had been subjected; and it must be remembered that to Massey and his friends he was no Pretender, but King James III., for had not King Louis, on the death of James II., acknowledged his son as King? So William Massey called for his horse, and rode out of Wirral into Lancashire to join Forster, the Pretender's general.

He was doubtless in Lancaster when the Pretender was proclaimed King, and marched with the army over the vile roads, entering Preston on the day following, where he would be with the leaders when they repaired to the market-place and again declared the Pretender King of England.

On November 12, 1715, General Wills, with the royal forces, was able to invest the place completely, but not before there had been sanguinary fighting, the Royalists losing about 200 killed and wounded, and the Jacobites, who were fighting behind the barricades they had erected, 42. The Jacobites then tried to make terms, but General Wills sent them back the stinging reply that he refused to treat with rebels, but that he would do his utmost to prevent his soldiers cutting them to pieces. So on the 14th General Forster surrendered, but

not before many of the Jacobites had secretly left the town on the night of the 12th.

Among them was William Massey, who, well mounted, got through the investing forces, and was soon urging his horse with whip and spur in the direction of Ormskirk, and, passing through the outskirts of Liverpool, he would spend a night under the stars, and knowing that all the ferries would be well watched, he would most probably ride on to the little village of Oglett, near Hale, where the water was shallow, and where in certain states of the tide there used to be a ford. But whether he succeeded in reaching the ford or not, he certainly put his horse at the upper reaches of the Mersey, and succeeded in reaching his home at Puddington Hall. The state of both man and beast may well be imagined, and one is not surprised to learn that next day the horse died and was buried, so the local tradition states, in a certain spot close to the house, and the country folk point out the very stone under which he lies!

But Massey bore too good a name not to be duly noted, and in a little time he was arrested and removed to Chester Castle, where he died very shortly after, probably a broken heart being one of the causes of his death. He bequeathed his estates to his little godson, William Stanley, who assumed the name of Massey.

The great racing stables, erected by the

Stanleys, which were one of the causes of the ruin of the ancient house of the Stanleys of Hooton, are hard by, and are now put to better use. The Priest's house, in front of which is the moat, has been tastefully restored, and on a sunny wall hard by, the wistaria hangs in rich clusters. And so the Wirral Masseys, like the Wirral Stanleys, have passed away, one Sir John Massey dying fighting with his face to the enemy on the side of Percy on the battlefield of Shrewsbury in 1403, and the last William Massey dying a poor, forlorn, broken rebel in the King's prison at Chester, hard by the home of his fathers, which he was never to revisit. Well, well, perhaps it is best that old families should die out and let new men in, thus preventing the world becoming too mouldy, and merely breeding the past. And so we bid good-bye to what William Webb describes as "that gallant lofty seat of Puddington, overlooking the sea," and go for some four miles to the north-east to Capenhurst.

Capenhurst is nearly six miles from Chester, and is situated on a plateau 137 feet above sea level, from which the land slopes gently.

The district is pleasantly broken by numerous plantations, and, on leaving the railway station, a wood will be noticed on the left, shielding Capenhurst Hall from the road. There is a wicket-gate which gives access to a path leading through

private grounds to the hall, along which the writer ventured to trespass, and was rewarded for his iniquity by viewing one of the prettiest wood gardens he has ever beheld. It was in May, and the bulbous plants were blooming in every direction, the colours and arrangement being carefully chosen, so that a patch of bright yellow gave vehemence to the flare of red and blue beyond. Unfortunately, the old timber mansion, the seat of the Capenhursts, has been taken down, and the present hall has been erected for perhaps a hundred years. It is a substantial brick building, to which a wing has been more recently added, not to the improvement of its architectural appearance.

The manor of Capenhurst belonged in the reign of Edward I. to the family of Capenhurst, and in the year 1701 Lord Cholmondeley had two-thirds of the manor, his ancestors having held land here as early as the reign of Henry VII. Sir James Poole held the other third, with the ancient hall. The manor of Capenhurst was purchased by Richard Richardson from Lord Cholmondeley in 1790, and his descendants still occupy the estate and hall.

It is a very compact estate of about two miles in extent, and the land, which seems good and well farmed, is let to the tenants at a low rent, on which they ought to be able to make a good return. The village of Capenhurst

is pretty, and the church, which was erected in 1858 by the Rev. R. Richardson, is well worthy of a visit, if only to see the beautiful and soberly coloured stained-glass windows by H. W. Bryans, a former pupil of Kemp, several of which are to the memory of the members of the Richardson family. Round the doorway is carved, "To the glory of God, the Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity, this church was built and endowed by the Rev. Richard Richardson of Capenhurst Hall, M.A. Born A.D. 1811, died A.D. 1885."

The situation of Capenhurst is good, and the district is salubrious. Of a family of five brothers named Maddock, farmers who lived here, Ormerod quotes the *Chester Courant* as saying that "It consisted of five brothers, whose ages ranged from 86 to 94. The aggregate of the ages was 450 years, giving an average of 90 to each. They were all, from the youngest to the eldest, perfectly competent to manage their business. They were good horsemen, active pedestrians, and capable of reading without the aid of glasses. The eldest, who wanted but six years of a century in age, had not abandoned any of the business duties with which his life had been associated, and gave promise of becoming a centenarian." No trace of the graves of these gentlemen could be found by the present writer, nor was the incident known in Capenhurst.

Willaston Hall

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CHAPTER VIII

WILLASTON

If ever the reader finds himself at Hooton, and the day appears to promise well, let him turn along the road which runs west to the ancient little village of Willaston, and go soon, for the building spirit is in the air, and land has acquired a building land value, so that men who bought it by the acre will now offer it you by the yard. The district is such an agreeable one to dwell in that it is certain to lose, in the not distant future, the pleasant flavour of an out-of-the-way place.

At present it is one of the most sequestered villages in the Hundred, and it is not easy, in so narrow a compass, to see grouped so many interesting ancient farm-houses, several of which are now standing vacant, for the Corbett estates in Willaston have been recently sold.

In the reign of Henry VII. the Trussels held Willaston, and the estates passed by marriage to John Vere, courtier of Henry VIII., the first Protestant Earl of Oxford, whose grandson Edward, eighteenth Earl, sold the manor in the reign of Elizabeth to several freeholders.

WILLASTON HALL

Willaston Hall stands almost on the road, and is a difficult building to photograph, because it is surrounded by a high wall, and the front is partly hidden by a beautiful spreading chestnut-tree. It is a nice old brick building, lighted by bay windows, and there is a large and handsome entrance-porch. It was erected by the Bennetts in 1558, and continued to be their residence for several centuries ; it has, however, been modernised, and is now a farm-house.

What an auspicious date to erect their dwelling, for in 1558 that magnanimous and prudent lady, Queen Elizabeth, succeeded to the throne of England, and was crowned the next year. So that within these walls the Bennetts would whisper the news of the murder of Darnley and the execution of the Queen of Scots. Again, these walls would echo to the shouts of joy when the news of the defeat of the great Spanish Armada came and spread like wildfire. Such houses as this are inestimable national treasures, and bring vividly before the imagination the historical scenes and interesting periods through which they have stood.

Nothing, perhaps, is more characteristic of rural life than a village alehouse, and in the Red Lion Inn, Willaston possesses an interesting specimen of the old English inn. It is a half-timber and brick building of about the Elizabethan period, and before newspapers existed the inn was a sort

Red Lion Inn, Willaston

of news-room, where the villagers came to drink their ale and learn the latest news; and it would be here that the Puritan would cast sour glances at the Cavalier as he left the inn; and it would be here, too, that the news of the battle of Marston Moor would be learned, and of the trial and execution of King Charles I.

Willaston still possesses a picturesque old mill, which is quite a feature of the landscape; and it may be noted that on the oldest maps there is a windmill marked in the village.

The land hereabout is amongst the best in Cheshire, and a villager with whom the writer conversed informed him that the landowner in the district had always been the best of friends to the farmers, and that Mr. Corbett would be much missed. The standard wage paid to a good farm-hand is 18s. per week, and the best hands receive 20s. But their rents have advanced considerably of late years; cottages which formerly rented at 2s. 6d. per week now command 4s. and 4s. 6d.—a large slice out of the 18s., on which, however, large families are brought up in some hardship, but in most cases in great respectability.

Leaving the village, and crossing the line by Hadlow Road railway station, the road leads through a rural district towards Burton; but just before it joins the Chester road a stone will be noticed on the left, looking exactly like a stone

placed for mounting horses. On examining it carefully it is perceived that the stone has been broken in three pieces, and that its present form is a matter of convenience. A learned man might give it a learned name, but the name the villagers give it—men, women, and children —is not to be written here.

In Ormerod's "History of Cheshire" is the following note, quoting a letter from the late Mr. Black :—"The Hundred of Wirral was in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries called Wilaston, Wylaston, or Willaston . . . there is, or was, or ought to be, a stone in or near the village of Willaston necessarily (by measures) forming part of the geometrical system of Roman topographical engineering in Cheshire. That stone being situate almost in the midst of the Forest of Wirral might easily have obtained the name of Wirral-stone, whence might have been derived the name of the townships, and of the whole Hundred, until the simple name of the Forest attached itself to the Hundred in the fourteenth century."

Is it possible that this is the stone to which Mr. Black refers, and the one that gave the name not only to Willaston, but to the whole of Wirral? That it is an ancient worked stone is undoubted, and it is pleasant to think that in this stone is perhaps seen the labour of the Roman

The Wirral Stone

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soldiers; in any case, if only to change its present name, and until a better reason is given for its position and history, it has been christened the "Wirral-stone."

Walk slowly from here up the steep hill to Burton, and notice the dark pine wood which stretches out on the rim of the hill until the trees stand almost in single file, whilst here and there a bright green contrasts vividly with their darker hues, and, on the top, stop for the view before going down into the pretty village which straggles along the road in front. To the west, over the marshes, the Dee is rising, for which the Welsh mountains make a fine setting; whilst to the south, Chester cathedral fills the eye. In front is Burton Rectory, and on going down into the village to where the blossomed pear-tree leans to the hedge, past the village Institute—one of the few modern buildings at Burton—the gift of Henry Neville Gladstone, Esq., of Burton Manor, the foundation-stone being laid in 1906, and you are among a most interesting assemblage of old and picturesque cottages, some of them perched high above the road on bright red sandstone. Several of them are in the old Cheshire half-timber style, whilst everywhere are trim gardens, quite full of old-fashioned garden flowers. The quaint little village post-office, with its flare of white broom in front, contrasting with the red sandstone upon which it stands, in which are

planted some bright rock plants, is a piece of gaudy colour not easily forgotten.

The manor of Burton, from a very early period, formed part of the estate of the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield, and as Church land claimed exemption from the harsh customs of the forest law, one of which was the cruel custom of cutting the feet of all dogs not belonging to the lord of the chase until they could pass through a ring, or "dog-gauge." This the tenants steadily refused to do, and enforced their rights of exemption in a court of law.

The manor was purchased in the year 1806 from the Bishop of Lichfield by Richard Congreve, of Burton Hall and of Aldermanston House in the county of Berks, and of Congreve in the county of Stafford, and continued in the possession of the family until recently, when it passed by purchase to Henry Neville Gladstone, Esq., the present proprietor.

Two members of the Congreve family are interesting, one in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on account of his literary attainments, and the other in the twentieth century as a gallant soldier. William Congreve, whose licentious comedies, abounding in witty dialogue, though banished from the stage, are still largely read, remains one of the greatest masters of repartee. He was one of the foremost wits of his day, and so attracted Voltaire, that he called

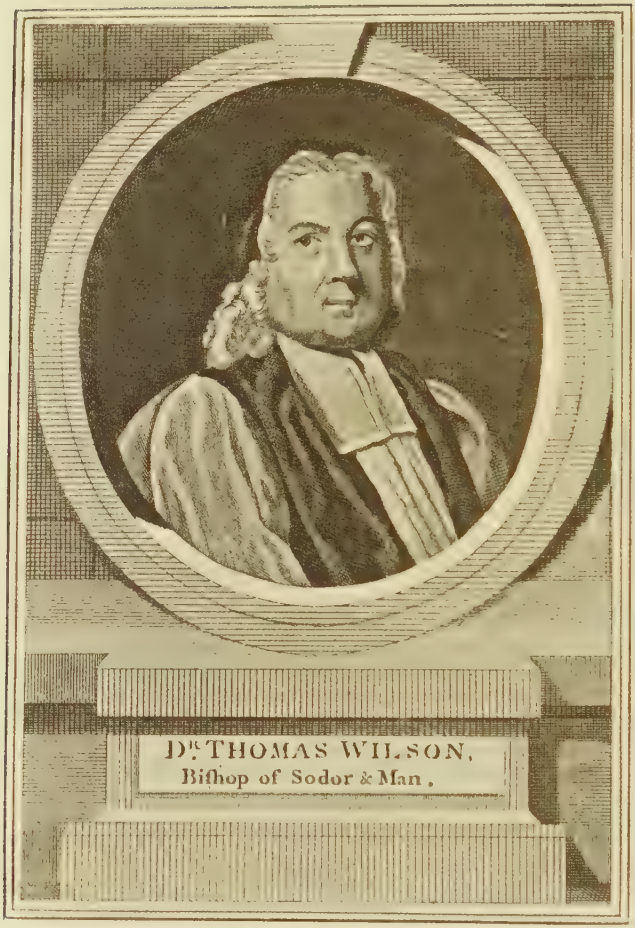
Burton Hall

upon him, and on Congreve saying that he would rather be considered a gentleman than a poet, the witty Frenchman replied, "If you had been merely a gentleman I should not have come to visit you." He was an intimate friend of the Duchess of Marlborough, daughter of the great Duke, and Duchess in her own right. On his death he left her the whole of his fortune, amounting to ten thousand pounds. The Duchess immediately repaired to her jeweller and spent seven of the ten thousand pounds on a diamond necklace. It is said that so devoted was this eccentric lady to his memory, that she had a figure of him in wax, which moved by clockwork, placed daily at her table.

The present writer spent a very happy day with Captain Congreve in Burton Manor many years ago, examining his books and pictures. He then possessed some interesting portraits by Sir Peter Lely and other great artists, amongst them being a very fine and interesting portrait of the witty and lively dramatist; the artist's name has faded from memory, but it was not the well-known portrait by Kneller.

The other interesting figure is Colonel Walter N. Congreve, V.C.

At the battle of Colenso Colonel Long galloped his guns and unlimbered them within five hundred yards of the enemy's trenches. But he had under-estimated the power of modern



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is a picturesque building of red sandstone, and was handsomely restored in 1870. The north aisle terminates in a Massey chancel, but their monuments have been destroyed. One is described in the Harleian MSS. as follows:—"In the Massey chancel an altar tomb of alabaster with two recumbent figures inlaid in black marble. The male figure habited in a gown and ruff, with sword on the right side, the head reposing on a cushion; the female figure having a large veil over the head. The hands of both clasped in prayer. Round the edge of the tomb, also inlaid in black marble, 'Here lyeth entombed the bodyes of William Massye, of Potinton Esq., who dyed the 4th of June 1579, and of Anne, his wife, who deceased the (30th) of November 1568, and had issue betweene them 6 sones and 11 daughters.'" Who was the Goth who destroyed this interesting monument?

The last of the Masseys, William Massey, who was out and broken in the cause of the Pretender, and who died miserably in Chester Castle, lies buried in Burton. In the parish registers is the following entry:—"1715 Mr. William Massey of Puddington buried February 25, 1715--16."

There is a plain tablet on the west wall whose simple annals are interesting, for it records the death of the father and mother of Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, who was born

at Burton in 1663, and was the fifth son of Nathaniel Wilson of Burton, and his wife, Alice Sherlock of Oxton. He completed his education at Trinity College, Dublin, and his uncle, Dr. Sherlock, rector of Winwick, introduced him to the Earl of Derby, who was so much impressed with his learning and simple piety, that in 1697 he offered him the bishopric of Sodor and Man. The annual revenue was but a modest three hundred pounds in those days, but so well did he manage his little estate that he had always funds at his disposal to feed the poor, as well as to render help to all in distress. Living a godly, righteous, and sober life, he was regarded, not only in this country, but on the Continent, so highly that Cardinal Fleury is said to have procured an order from the Court of France that no French privateers should interfere with shipping on the coasts of the Isle of Man. Both King William and Queen Anne offered him better bishoprics in Ireland and in England, but he constantly declined them.

He was born in the pretty old farm-house opposite to the entrance to Burton Manor. In former years the cottage wore a somewhat neglected air, but lately it has been treated with generous care, and the addition of the chains and railings in place of the tumble-down wall, which once guarded it, has added much to its present neat and picturesque appearance.

Birthplace of Bishop Wilson, Burton

His works are now little read by the general public, but he has influenced the men who influence, and John Henry Newman praises his life and work highly, saying, "Burning indeed and shining, like the Baptist, in an evil time, he seemeth as if a beacon lighted on his small island, to show what his Lord and Saviour could do in spite of man." There was a time when no collector of books felt quite happy unless he possessed a large paper copy of Bishop Wilson's edition of the Bible.

In the tower is a peal of six bells, with interesting inscriptions, one of which states "that Abr: Rudhall cast us all, 1724," and another, of more recent date, is inscribed:—

"Ring out black sin,
Fair peace ring in."
A.D. 1896.
John Taylor & Co., founders, Loughborough.

The present vicar, the Rev. P. F. A. Morrell, B.A., has recently published an excellent little work entitled "Notes on Burton Parish Registers," which throws much light on the life in Burton during the past centuries, and is of the greatest interest:—

"1645 September the 20th the Parliament forces entered the suburbes of Chester by Forgate Street fields. On Wednesday the 24th of September on Routon Moor and Hoole Heath

were most terrible battayles fought between the King and Parliament wherein the Parliament Partie prevayled."

"The Parliament Armie entered into Wales the second time on Sunday September 28th.

"H. F. CLEARKE."

Imagine the state of Burton village in those days when the news of these important historic happenings first reached it. How the Cavaliers in the little village would hang their heads in shame and anger, and how the Puritans would swagger past, with a sour smile of pity for those poor deluded, wrong-headed Cavaliers! News, it is true, travelled slowly, but life was lived strenuously, even in Burton village, and men took sides and hated bitterly.

In the woods which crown the summits at Burton—in which spend plenty of time and listen to "the wise thrush," whilst enjoying the view over the Dee—will be found in the pathway, above the churchyard, two grave-stones lying side by side, one of which bears the date 1663. The inscriptions are obliterated, but they are known to be the last resting-places of two Quakers, man and wife. In these days we regard Quakerism as the meekest of faiths; but in those days it was looked upon by the majority of Churchmen and Dissenters as an active spirit of evil, and they saw contamination

Quakers' Graves, Burton Woods

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and disgrace in everything connected with it; so that the two meek Quakers of Burton were refused, or themselves rejected, burial in Burton churchyard, choosing as their last sleeping-place the centre of the pathway, where the men who had stood on their hearts whilst alive might daily trample over their heads when dead. The long intolerant arguments of those days come vividly before the mind as one views the recumbent stones, and in fancy we almost hear, "My prison shall be my grave before I will budge a jot; for I owe my conscience to no mortal man."

In former days the woods were unenclosed, and visitors strayed where they listed, but now a course is set through them, and if it confines ardent spirits, at all events it gives the wild-flowers a chance to survive the depredations of excursionists, the woods of Burton in the summer being gay with wild-flowers, which nestle in all directions amidst the ferns.

The old mill close to the summit of the hill is a picturesque object, and it was there that John Haggassman, miller to the Masseys, was killed by a thunderbolt in 1579, the accident being duly recorded in the parish registers.

Milling in those days was a rich monopoly, and the lords of the manor provided a mill for the accommodation of their tenants, the charge for grinding being paid by the miller taking a certain percentage of the grain, and sometimes

he would take twice from the same sack, just to be quite certain that he had not forgotten his share. So that it is small wonder that such a profitable business was well looked after, and in the parish register there is the following entry: "Burton Milne was built new by Sir William Massey Knighte about the feast of all Saints in anno 1629."

Descend from the mill and walk down to Burton Rocks, and when you get there look over the wide stretch of marsh land, over which the tide is slowly advancing, and listen to the cries of the wild-fowl which feed in the numerous gullies and tideways; and as you look at the advancing shallow water, remember that Burton Point was in 1399 the spot where archers and troops were shipped for Ireland.

A very rough road will be found running by the fringe of the great marshes past Denhall House, formerly the seat of Charles Stanley, Esq., one of the principal proprietors of the collieries, combining a healthful situation with a pleasing prospect. The Denhall collieries are not now worked, although those hard by at Neston are still yielding a good supply. The hospital at Denhall was discontinued in 1485, but its revenues still continue to form part of the income of the See of Lichfield.

In this little village, hard by Nesse, of which it is a part, was born Amy Lyon, afterwards to be

known as Emma Hart, and ultimately to become the celebrated and notorious Lady Hamilton. What a romance! that out of this little place should come a country girl of lowly origin, a serving lass, and rise to be the intimate of a Queen. Yet so it is, for in the church of Great Neston is to be found the birth certificate of this remarkable woman. It is as follows:— "Emy, D^r^ of Henry Lyon, smith, of Nesse, by Mary his wife. Bap. 12th May 1765." In the same year the little child had the great misfortune to lose her father, and in the same church is recorded that "Henry Lyon, of Denhall, smith, was buried 21st June 1765."

Her mother was a native of Hawarden, and finding it impossible to support herself and family in Nesse, she removed with her little baby to her old home, where dwelt her friends, and in the course of years Emma was trained for domestic service, growing up a handsome, lively, frolicsome country lass. She might have walked the ordinary path of one of her station had not Linley the great composer, who was also a part proprietor of Drury Lane theatre, needed a nurse girl. Through a friend Emma was recommended to him, and she proceeded to London. On her return to Hawarden for a short holiday, she came filled to the brim with London life and manners, some of which were looked at askance by her former friends, for on her attending Wepre Fair,

held in the neighbourhood, and returning home at perhaps some unearthly London hour at night, or possibly early next morning, her friends decided that her ways were no more their ways, and put a period to her jollity by sending the giddy girl packing back to London.

Here the gaiety of London life accomplished its work on the bright and attractive girl, who ultimately became the mistress of the Hon. Sir Charles Greville, nephew of Sir William Hamilton. Sir William's wife died in 1782, and in 1784, hearing that his nephew contemplated marrying Miss Emma Hart, he returned to England, and succeeded in averting the threatened misalliance. Returning abroad, he received a visit from Miss Emma Hart. Perhaps the refining and innocent intimacy she had had with Romney had stripped her of much of her vulgarity; but in any case Sir William fell in love with her, and, after living under his protection, they were ultimately married in England in 1791 and returned to Naples, where he was English Ambassador. There she became intimate with Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, and is said to have possessed great influence over her. She first saw Nelson in 1793, and just before going to the Battle of Trafalgar, Nelson, in a codicil to his will, wrote: "I leave Emma Lady Hamilton a legacy to my King and country."

After Nelson's death Lady Hamilton, through

extravagance, became involved in debt, although enjoying legacies both from Nelson and Hamilton, and in 1813 was confined a prisoner for debt in the King's Bench. Ultimately she escaped from prison to Calais, where she died in the obscurity in which she had been born. Well! well! let others cast the stone, whilst we who realise how much she sinned and suffered, thank God, not that we are not as other men are, but that our temptation has been less, or that we have been enabled to withstand it better than the poor country girl born in this little village, who was afterwards to be known for all time as Emma, Lady Hamilton.

CHAPTER IX

NESTON

I was quite hungry when I approached Neston, and inquiring from a countryman where I could get something to eat, he replied with a knowing nod, "Well, sir, wait until you get into the centre of the town and then—" "Oh," I said, "is Neston really a town?" to which he replied in an apologetic way, "Well, not exactly a town —still, sir, it used to be afore the big towns were." Yes, Neston used to be a town before the big towns grew, and on approaching it nowadays and passing up its long, straggling main street, one asks why it was ever classed as a town, so sleepy does it appear, and so absent is the scene of bustle and eagerness that is inseparable from a town, that one wonders why the little place should be served by two different lines of railway, and be the proud possessor of two railway stations, in different quarters.

Yet there was a time when Neston was the most populous place in the Hundred of Wirral, and when its streets rang to the tramp of armed men, for during several centuries it was the town

to which travellers from all parts of England came on their way to Ireland, and in which they could take their choice of accommodation from a dozen good inns; and even with this command of quarters accommodation was at times hard to be obtained, and mine host at the inn waxed prosperous, for the river Dee had further silted up, and the Irish packets could neither reach Chester, nor the once important port of Shotwick, for the draught of the vessels was growing greater, and on the Dee trade was moving farther north.

It was in the reign of Edward III. that, one bitter day in February, Thomas Fox, the Duke's varlet, hung about in Neston cooling his heels, and waiting the arrival of his mistress's body, Elizabeth, Duchess of Clarence, who had died in Ireland. Day after day he waited, and still the ship the body was aboard failed to arrive, but at last the vessel hove in sight, and all Neston doubtless went out and uncovered as the body was brought ashore, attended by two officers of the Princess's household—John de Neuborne, and her chaplain, Nicholas de Fladburg—who accompanied the royal corpse on its last journey. No wonder Thomas Fox had grown anxious, for no less than fourteen days had been consumed in sailing from Ireland to the port of Great Neston, and after resting and making the necessary arrangements, they conveyed the body to the manor of Bruseyard. An idea of the

extent and hardship of travel in those days may be gathered from the following extract from the original payment of the Wardrobe Roll :—

"Item on account of the custody of the body of the said Duchess at Neston in Wyrhale, incurred from the beginning by said Nicholas and John, namely, for fourteen days, 18. And for one cart with four horses, conducted from said town of Neston, conveying the aforesaid corpse to Chester, 4/. And for one cart, with two men and six horses, similarly conducted, to convey the said corpse from Chester to Coventry, whence the cart came, for six days, at 6/8 a day, 40/. And for one other cart, with two men and six horses, similarly conducted, to convey the said corpse from Coventry to Bruseyard, in the County of Suffolk, whence the cart came, for ten days, at 10/ a day, 100. And for the journey of Thomas Ffoc (Fox), varlet of the Duke Clarence, going from London the first day of February in same year to Neston in Wyrhale aforesaid, to meet aforesaid corpse and following it with vehicle from Neston aforesaid to Bruseyard aforesaid for 29 days, at 12d. each day, 29/."

That was something like a funeral! Fancy the time and expense, for although the money payment sounds small it must be recollected that its value has greatly changed from those days, and a journey into Central Africa might almost

be taken to-day in the same amount of time, and you may safely pity poor Thomas Fox following the corpse over the awful winter roads. We scarcely realise in our day the great advantages we reap from those mediums of civilisation—good roads—and we ought all to go down on our knees and thank Heaven fasting, for the two great road-makers, Telford and Macadam. Even in the eighteenth century Arthur Young declared the road between Liverpool and Manchester to be so bad that he could find nothing in the whole range of language to describe it, and he advises all travellers to avoid it if possible, for some of the ruts, he says, after a wet summer, were over three feet deep and full of water. If roads were so bad in the eighteenth century and in the summer, what must they have been like in 1364, when Thomas Fox left Neston in mid-winter?

It was in the reign of Edward VI. that Neston grew vastly in importance, for a new quay or haven was constructed, "All of stone and in the face or belly of the sea which would cost at least five thousand or six thousand pounds," and in order to provide this then large sum of money the people of Chester were specially assessed, and even this not providing an adequate amount, special collections were made in all the churches in England. At last the necessary funds were raised and the quay was constructed, the town gradually spreading itself

out, so that in a little while a collection of houses grew up in the neighbourhood which gradually became known as Parkgate, and grew into a watering-place and health resort, to which many fashionable people came, and where they rested on their journeys to and from Ireland.

Indeed, so great did the trade and importance of Neston become, that in 1780 it was the chief point of departure for goods and passengers going to and coming from Ireland, and it was only when the channel of the Dee was made navigable all the way to Chester that Neston lost its importance as a port, and gradually settled down to its present condition of a nice little sleepy Cheshire town.

Yet Neston was all agog and full of bustle in the eighteenth century when the coaches came rattling up the main street from Chester bringing numerous passengers from London, and were met by the mail-coach bringing passengers and mails from Liverpool. From Chester the coaches passed through Little Mollington, the township of Shotwick, to the town of Neston, whilst the mails were conveyed from Liverpool across the Mersey, and hence through Great Bebington and Thornton-Mayo to Neston.

When the stormy winds blew and the great sea-horses were tossing angrily at the mouth of the Dee, then was the harvest for the inn-keepers, for their guests were kept waiting until the weather mended and the masters

thought it safe for their vessels to proceed to sea. So the women would wait anxiously, and the men, after consuming numerous bottles of port—for in those days there were two-bottle men, three-bottle men, and even four-bottle men —would proceed in the old roystering way to a cock-fight, for there was a good pit in the close neighbourhood, and cock-fighting was a very usual pastime. Indeed so early as 1619, William, Earl of Derby, made at Chester "a fair cock-pitt under St. John's in a garden by the water side, to which resorted gents of all parts, and great cocking was used a long while." Neston was at one time the property of the Earl of Derby, but it was alienated at the latter end of the sixteenth century by William, Earl of Derby, in a gaming transaction to William Whitmore. It almost makes one tremble to think of those three or four bottles of good old port under the waistcoat of an evening, and one bottle "for the good of the house" was a very small affair. Did the sun shine brighter and was the zest of life keener in the days before the era of steam? "Now, gentlemen, please, the coach is ready," and away they went from Neston to Chester to join the mail-coaches which rattled along the road at nine miles or more an hour, including stoppages. In the coaching days Great Neston had a population of 1486, whilst the population of Birkenhead was but 110. But the era

of steam has altered all this, and now the coach horn is not heard—

> "No more the sleepy toll-bar man
> Is roused at early morn,
> And turns reluctant out of bed,
> With a curse on that long horn,"

but the shrill whistle of the steam-engine announces to the residents of Neston that the 9.22 is departing.

The average person will tell you that there is nothing to be seen in Neston, and certainly there are few antiquities, for the place grew with its trade, and the old buildings had to give place to new. Yet there are a few quaint houses and byways still remaining, and the church and churchyard are of the greatest interest.

The church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Helen, and the entire building, with the exception of the tower, was rebuilt of red sandstone in 1874–75, and is worth visiting if for no other reason than to see the four beautiful Burne-Jones windows which, for soberness of colouring, yet in certain lights glowing with brilliant hues, seem to be the very perfection of composition. The names of Burne-Jones and William Morris are associated with the work, for the artist's designs were carried out by workmen under the watchful care of William Morris. In the north aisle the window in memory of David Russell, M.D., contains three full-length

figures of Enoch, David, and Elijah, and beside it, in memory of Reginald Bushell, is a very finely designed window containing figures of St. Paul and St. Thomas; beside it again is one in memory of J. G. Churton; and in the south aisle is perhaps the loveliest window of all, in memory of Christopher Bushell. It is filled by two large figures emblematic of Justice and Humility, and is one of the most perfect designs ever executed by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

Several of the remaining windows from designs by Kemp are worthy of note, particularly two in the south aisle, and the east window is filled with richly stained glass.

At the west end is a finely wrought iron gateway inscribed "In deo spes mea. In memory of Reginald Bushell, born August 18, 1842, died November 11, 1904." There is a brass on the wall of the north aisle to the memory of the late Vicar, William Fergusson Barrett, M.A., who died almost before he had reached the afternoon of life. On the brass is engraved Chaucer's lines—

> "But Cristes love and his Apostles twelve
> He taught, and first he followed it himselve."

The font, which at one time was discarded and placed outside the church exposed to the weather to make room for one of more modern design, has now been restored to its proper position, and is a very interesting and elegant piece of work-

manship, executed, perhaps, five hundred years ago, each side of the basin being decorated with quatrefoils and other early fifteenth-century ornaments. Placed beside the font are several ancient stones, probably of Saxon origin, which were disinterred from beneath the walls when the church was restored.

The churchyard is interesting, and contains a sun-dial, and many of the tombs are a bright commentary on the healthfulness of the neighbourhood. On one tombstone is cut, "John Duncan, died Feb. 26, 1885, aged one hundred years." Another is to the memory of "John Hancock of Ledsham (d. 1775), aged 112."

In the main street is a drinking fountain erected to the memory of Christopher Bushell, and dated 1882.

Passing along the Parkgate Road there are some nice old-fashioned houses, one of which carries the date 1727, and in a short walk you enter Parkgate.

William Webb writes in the seventeenth century: "And next neighbour to this is the well-known town, parish church, and port of Great Neston: and the usual place where our passengers into Ireland do so often lie waiting the leisure of the winds, which makes many people better acquainted with this place than they desire to be, though there be wanting no convenient entertainment, if no other wants lie in the way: and here

PARKGATE

CHELSEA

is the station of the ships called The New Key, where they embark and disembark both men, horses, kine, and all other commodities on the back of this Neston."

Consult the very latest and most expensive gazetteer, and you will still find Parkgate described as a "bathing-place," which all goes to show how hard it is to destroy an old and excellent reputation. There are no bathing vans there now, although Parkgate has still a season "of sorts," but, generally speaking, you might run your guns down on to the front, and after requesting the few fishermen, always to be found on the sea-wall with nothing particular to do, to remove for a moment on to the sands, open fire along "the front" without committing any serious damage, for "All on one side like Parkgate" is a perfectly true saying, and "the parade" ends in the fields.

But still Parkgate is a likeable, healthful place, and a neighbourhood which is being found out as a residential quarter, for the views it commands of Wales and the Welsh mountains are excellent, and the prevailing winds, being north-west, come to it full of sweet, refreshing, health-giving ozone. Yes, even when the tide is at the full ebb, and the long dreary stretch of sands, across which it seems almost possible to walk into Wales, stretch themselves out as far as the eye can reach, it remains a pleasing prospect, for by turning a few

degrees to the east the eye may refresh itself with green fields full of wild-flowers, and whilst sitting on the sea-wall you may hear the call of the corn-crakes.

Yet, in spite of its many attractions, Parkgate has not withstood the competition of other watering-places, for at one time it was the very Llandudno of Wirral, and boasted large inns to which were attached coaching establishments, at which might be cracked a bottle of the best port over a "fresh roast" lunch. Now they will tell you at the inn on the front, if you arrive in late May on a Saturday morning, "that they have nothing cooked." Listen—don't allow them to keep you waiting whilst they cook a lunch that will anchor you out as solid as an anvil for the rest of the afternoon. Ask them to give you whatever they like, and they will bring you two dishes of potted shrimps with a good supply of bread and butter. Order something to drink, if not for your own good, "for the good of the house," as our forefathers used to say, and you have a meal which emperors might envy.

On the front are some old houses, in some of which once dwelt fishermen who added to their calling the lucrative and dangerous one of smuggling, and in the rooms of some, huge cavities are built in the walls in which the contraband used to be hidden. The house occupied by Mr. W. Mealor has a very interesting smuggler's

hole, entered by taking up a piece of boarding in one of the rooms above. It is quite ten feet deep and of capacious storage room, but it was difficult to judge the exact size on account of complete darkness, the only light obtainable being that from a few matches, which flared up for a moment, and then but deepened the gloom.

Smuggling in those days was a dangerous game, for the custom-house officers were given to shooting first and asking questions afterwards, and the smugglers were equally severe on the officers. In another county an officer, meeting a smuggler, says, "Knowing he was too good a man for me, for we had tried it out before, I shot Daniel through the head"; and in 1749, at Chichester, Sir Michael Forster tried seven smugglers for the murder of two custom-house officers, which all goes to show that however interesting smuggling was it had its dangerous side.

At the side of the house a passage leads to a curious wynd in which are some ancient cottages, a relic of old Parkgate, whilst farther along the front, where the green fields commence, is the curious old half-timbered watch-house, whose inmates used to be the terror of evil-doers.

In this cottage, too, once dwelt poor S. W. Ryley, who, through misfortune, became a strolling player. He was the author of "The Itiner-

ant, or Memoirs of an Actor," in nine volumes, which, though published in London, was entirely printed in Liverpool, the first and second series being dedicated to William Roscoe, and the third series to the Earl of Sefton. It is a very entertaining book, and forcibly points from bitter experience the miseries incident to the life of a strolling player. In volume vi. he says :—

"I took a small cottage at Parkgate, in Cheshire, at the annual rent of £5. Here I placed my mother-in-law ; and here, thank God, she is at this moment. My small residence stands on an eminence, the base of which is washed by the returning tides of the river Dee, perhaps fifty yards from my cottage door. The Welsh mountains on the opposite shore, six miles distant, form an amphitheatre extending north and south, and when the tide is in it covers an expanse of at least twenty miles, and presents one of the finest views imagination can conceive, comprehending everything the artist requires to constitute the sublime and beautiful. Thus situated—in full view of what I have endeavoured to describe—I am at this moment endeavouring to throw my thoughts on paper."

Quite at the end is the site of the famous old Boat-House inn which was taken down many years ago, and whose fine old oak beams and

A Relic of Old Parkgate

fittings sold at good prices. Now, only a large barn or two remain, on one of which can be faintly traced "Livery Stables." The proprietors of this inn used to run a four-in-hand coach daily to and from Birkenhead, as well as special coaches to Hooton. In front used to be the bathing vans, numbering thirteen or fourteen, and a stand of thirty or more donkeys. A pair of grey donkeys used to excite special admiration, for they were neatly harnessed in a smart little carriage, which held four ladies, besides the driver, and the "bloods" would invariably hire this carriage and drive about "as though they had bought the freehold."

Evidence of the importance of Parkgate may be gauged from some of the old road books, and in "Paterson's Roads," 18th edition, edited by Mogg, published without a date, but with the preface dated 1829, is the following :—

"Parkgate has lately been much resorted to by the gay and fashionable world, during the season, for the pleasure of bathing; it consists, for the most part, of a long range of good modern brick buildings, situated on the banks of the Dee. This place is also noted as a station from whence packets sail for Ireland, which they do generally four times in a week. The inhabitants of Parkgate are numerous, and may almost be said to derive their support from the expenditure of visitors.

"At Parkgate passengers frequently take shipping for Dublin, distance by water about 120 miles; the distance from Holyhead to Dublin is not more than 60 miles; but the traveller who takes shipping at Parkgate saves the land travelling through Wales from Chester to Holyhead."

William Daniell, R.A., in his large and beautifully illustrated book, entitled "A Voyage Round Great Britain," undertaken in the summer of 1813, crossed over in a packet from Wales, and, landing at Parkgate, describes the coast view, adding:—

"It is somewhat enlivened, however, an Englishman may be proud to say, by the little town of Parkgate, whose single row of houses, gaily dressed in whitewash and red ochre, may be seen and admired from afar. We landed again in our native land at this place, and in our walk from the boat to the inn had an opportunity of seeing all that it holds out to the curiosity and amusement of a stranger. It was built solely for bathers, but has the misfortune to be in the worst situation that could be desired for their accommodation. We are generally content in these kinds of establishments to give up all other conveniences for the sake of salt water, but here that is given up too for two-thirds of a day, and in

exchange for it one has the satisfaction of seeing from every window of his house a dismal waste of sand, and that too, so soft and so intersected by deep furrows, that it is not passable with comfort or safety by man or horse. One may reckon, indeed, with certainty on a dip every day, but it is exceedingly annoying to be remodelling your engagements and inclinations according to irregularity of the tide's attendance. The condition of visitors at low water is truly deplorable, but having lingered through the full penance of the ebb tide, their spirits rise with the flood, and at high water there is a general burst of business and animation. We arrived at just such a juncture, when the beach was all alive, and discovered a spectacle which a foreigner might have moralised upon with more seriousness than we of this free country can be permitted to do. Few of either sex thought it necessary to hide themselves under the awnings of bathing machines: posts with ropes fastened to them are fixed in the sands, and these were taken possession of by numerous groups of women, six or seven in a row, jumping, shouting, laughing and screaming, evidently as careless of being seen as of being drowned.

"He would be a fool or worse who accused them of any intentional indelicacy, but I do think it would be as well were they not to despise bathing machines, for the few plain reasons that induce so many to use them."

Oh! poor William Daniell, why didn't you turn your face to the wall and swear you did not see? I am profoundly thankful that you did not walk with me through rural Japan, because there they bathe just as they used to at Parkgate, only the bathing dress is absent as well as the bathing machine.

Many interesting people visited Parkgate, and if some of the books formerly belonging to the inns could be found, and gone through, they would reveal names of great interest, for all going to and from Ireland were at times delayed by weather.

Certainly Mrs. Delany, whose father succeeded to the title of Lord Lansdowne, and was the friend and patron of numerous literary men and women of his day, stayed there. She, as her letters show, lived in the centre of a literary circle and painted well, besides writing delightful letters. Writing from Parkgate she says:—

"We have good reason to think we shall sail this evening. The wind is turning about and is very temperate and pleasant, and we have secured our passage in the yacht. She is a charming, clean, new ship, and reckoned the best sailer on the coast. The Dean went on board of her yesterday to fix the best accommodation he could, and had we not come to Parkgate as we did, we should not have found room. People come every day, and the place is crowded.

Sally is amazed at the sea, but is not at all frightened. Yesterday morning we walked to a neighbouring village called Nessan, to visit the minister, Mr. Mapletop, his wife, and daughters."

There is a picture—had she not come to Parkgate when she did the place could not have held her for the night. Now, during most months you may stroll into the place a lonely Crusoe of the fields, and eight out of ten of the men you meet are fishermen—for the fishery is still good, and yields salmon, soles, and all kinds of flat fish. The charge for a salmon licence for a pull net is £5, and for a swim net £15.

But if the bucks from London tarried at Parkgate, and gave the watch an anxious time, there also came women trembling and waiting for the packets aboard which were their loved ones, who had set out from Ireland. Day after day they waited for the overdue vessels; becoming at last uneasy, then anxious, and at length abandoning all hope, set out for home, knowing the sea would never give them back their dead.

Poor Edward King, the friend of Milton and younger son of Sir John King, perished miserably by shipwreck on his way from Ireland to Parkgate in 1637. He was a brilliant scholar, and his death was bitterly felt by Milton, who has commemorated it in one of the most exquisite poems in our language, of which Tennyson said

to Fitzgerald, "It is the touchstone of poetic taste."

> "For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
> Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
> Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
> Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
> He must not float upon his watery bier
> Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
> Without the meed of some melodious tear."

And poor, ever-in-debt Theophilus Cibber, the actor and playwright, perished in a similar manner in the eighteenth century. He was the son of the famous Colley Cibber, and lived the life of a prodigal whenever he chanced to be out of prison for debt, and could raise a little money, and escape his duns. If the poor fellow had reached Parkgate, as like as not he would have proceeded to the best inn and ordered shrimps for breakfast and soles for supper, with something to wash it down, and very possibly have been unable to pay the score next morning.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* appears the following: "Sept. 14, 1806. The *King George* packet of and from Parkgate for Dublin was lost this night near Hoyle Bank, and it is said all on board except three or four perished. She had upwards of one hundred passengers, but only four cabin passengers."

Then comes the recollection of Charles Kingsley, at one time Canon of Chester, whose poetry,

Raby Mere

CHELSEA

like his character, is simple, manly, and straightforward; and as the tide comes stealthily creeping over the sands twisting and turning in the gullies like a huge serpent, his verses, set to music by Frederic Clay, ring out in the memory—

"'O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
Across the sands of Dee;'
The western wind was wild and dank with foam,
And all alone went she.

"The western tide crept up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see;
The rolling mist came down and hid the land,
And never home came she.

"'Oh! is it weed, or fish, or floating hair,—
A tress of golden hair,
A drownèd maiden's hair,
Above the nets at sea?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
Among the stakes on Dee.'

"They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel, crawling foam,
The cruel, hungry foam,
To her grave beside the sea;
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee."

It is a pleasant walk from Parkgate to Raby, which lies about three miles to the north-east,

and after crossing the high road to Chester the pretty lanes are entered, and you go down hill to Raby village, a tiny little place, which, however, can boast one of the most picturesque old inns in Wirral, built in the Cheshire half-timber style, with a painted sign outside, and called the Wheat Sheaf. Probably you will refresh, and pay, and travel on, thanking your lucky stars that you have not to sleep there; but there was a time when to sleep under that roof would have been counted a great luxury, and many a tired traveller in those far-off days has drawn his breath more easily on beholding its lights, knowing that inside he would find supper and a hearty welcome. It was probably built early in the seventeenth century.

Go still down the hill, and presently you will find yourself in the neighbourhood of the tea-houses, and below you is the celebrated Raby Mere—that resort of happy lovers and enthusiastic photographers. It is a large sheet of water, and the woods come down to its brink on three sides. On the fourth is generally found some youthful Walton busily angling.

Here you may rest and take your tea in the garden of a cottage among pretty old-fashioned flowers, and at the end of May there is a splendid show of hawthorns and wild hyacinths, which glimmer through the woods in almost a haze of blue, for all the way to Bromborough there are pretty copse woods and trees of larger growth.

Wheat-Sheaf Inn, Raby

DIBBENSDALE

DIBBENSDALE

If it is at the end of May do not go over the fields to Bromborough, but go down and pass over the picturesque bridge at Dibbensdale, and a little above the bridge, on either side of the road, you will find a remarkable display of wild hyacinths, with here and there a growth of campion flaming out of the blue.

Once past the Marfords you are quickly at Bromborough railway-station, or if you are not too tired you can go on to Bromborough village, cross the fields, and pass through the Eastham woods to Eastham Ferry, and sail down the Mersey to Liverpool.

CHAPTER X

WIRRAL FOOTPATHS ASSOCIATION

If you are not mad enough to live wretchedly in order to die rich, leave your business to take care of itself and walk over the fields to Heswall. But before starting post a subscription to the Wirral Footpaths Association, for had it not been for the wise intervention of this Association many footpaths across the green fields would have been closed to the public, and pedestrians would have had to hammer along the hard highroads, and to take their basting of motor dust with as much philosophy and as moderate language as possible. As it is, the Association has made ancient footpaths common property, and in Wirral it is possible to walk across green fields and view the cloud of motor dust arise harmlessly in the distance.

"A man never rises so high," said Oliver Cromwell, "as when he knows not whither he is going," and so one fine May morning I set out for a walk, not intending to go anywhere in particular, and in the end proved the learned Dr. Johnson wrong, for I carried no knowledge with me, and yet managed to bring some home.

Never walk through Birkenhead; always ride in an electric car, or take the train, for it is a weary way to the outskirts, and the distance is growing steadily. In former days the town was shaken off in the first mile or two; now houses cling to you for several miles, and are not shaken off even at Prenton, which used to be far in the country. Roads containing modern villas have sprung up there, and even the Wirral waterworks, which used to stand alone on the ridge, has now a road running close to it, and a new royal red post pillar-box at its very doors!

How changed the place is from when William Webb visited it in the seventeenth century. He reached Prenton "where one race of Haukenhuls have a fine house and demesne: the present owner thereof John Oakenhall, Esquire." Little of interest will be found in Prenton until your path leads you across the golf-course, and then you will be most interested in keeping clear of badly sliced golf-balls, for they drive over the pathway, and a story is told of a poor pedestrian who was walking over the links being struck on the head by a golf-ball. He waited patiently for the striker to arrive, and then blurted out, "Are you aware, sir, that your ball struck me on the head?" and the reply that was vouchsafed to his query was, "Oh! did it? Where did it bounce to?"

But once you are across the links the country

is fairly entered, and you find a curious old road stretching out in front, consisting of roughly cut and dressed stones, much worn with continual tramping, for they have occupied their present position for many centuries. It is certainly a very interesting roadway, and meeting a man well advanced in years coming towards Prenton accompanied by a little girl, I asked him what manner of road it was. I had reason to regret my question, for I had started him on his subject. "This," said he, evidently much surprised at my ignorance, "is a Roman road, and was built and travelled by the Romans in Wirral more than two thousand years ago;" he gave me such a string of arguments in favour of his theory that he fairly beat me down, and it was only after a little time that I was able to exclaim, "But it is not mentioned in 'Roman Cheshire'!" "Not mentioned in 'Roman Cheshire,'" he retorted; "what of that? What do those fellows know who write books? They don't live in the neighbourhood. Now, I've lived in Birkenhead all my life." This was his last and clinching argument, and I escaped. A little farther up I inquired again from a young man, and a pedestrian who seemed to know the country well. "Oh!" said he, "these are called the Monks' Stepping Stones, and they used to come all the way from the Monks' Ferry, which is close to the Priory at Birkenhead. They go up to one of their old churches, the ruins of which

you will find in a farm-yard farther on." The story of the ruins of an old church in a farm-yard put a period to the conversation, and I asked no further questions, but walked steadily on and examined the road. It certainly is a very ancient roadway, and I noticed it often travelled through low-lying land and up towards the interesting remains of Storeton Hall, to which my footsteps were directed. After examining it carefully for its whole way, I came to the conclusion that it was but natural that the people who built Storeton Hall and administered its fine demesne in those far-off days would also have the intelligence to make a road of this sort. Then I remembered that when I was walking through Japan I came across a similar, and even more ancient roadway, along which I travelled — it makes my feet ache to think of it, for I was wearing shoes of straw — for nearly ten miles, and along which numerous pack ponies were coming and going, and as it was pouring with rain, and the ponies refused to leave the stones, I was often pushed into the mud at either side. So I came to the conclusion that the old Prenton and Storeton road was neither made by the Romans nor the monks, but by the sensible dwellers in Prenton and Storeton in far-off days, who were averse to tramping through the mud.

On reaching home, "Notes on the Old Halls of Wirral," by W. Fergusson Irvine, was taken

from the shelves, and this is what he says concerning the road:—

"Our way from Prenton to Storeton lies along an ancient lane popularly called the Monks' Stepping Stones, also sometimes called the Roman Road. Both names are quite misleading. That an occasional monk may have stepped along these stones is quite probable, and there can be little doubt that sometimes a stray Roman may have used this very lane nearly two thousand years ago, but it has no more right to either name than any other lane in the neighbourhood. These stones were probably placed in their present position some time in the Middle Ages, just as stones were put in any miry spot, when the locality could afford it, in other parts of the country. They were mainly used by the heavily laden pack horses that carried merchandise from village to village in the days before wheeled traffic became possible."

Few people realise the state of the roads in England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when it was nearly impossible to travel at speed in any direction, for the roads were not roads so much as tracks. During the Civil War some eight hundred cavalry were taken prisoners while sticking in the mud in Buckinghamshire; and, so late as 1768, when

Ancient Road, Prenton

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Arthur Young was travelling in the northern counties of England, he describes the road between Preston and Wigan, saying: "I actually measured ruts of four feet deep, floating with mud after a wet summer, and between the towns I actually passed three carts broken down in those eighteen miles of execrable memory."

Storeton is on a slight eminence, and stands 150 feet above sea level, so that it is situated nearly 50 feet higher than Prenton, and was a pleasing eminence on which to erect a dwelling, as well as a commanding place for defensible purposes. The surrounding land was marshy, and even at the beginning of the nineteenth century Storeton was not a place that commended itself to Ormerod, for after stating that Storeton is situated immediately to the south-west of Little Bebington, he exclaims in his bitter manner: "Both are composed of straggling huts scattered along the edge of a bleak barren moor." No moor now exists, for men have tilled the earth awhile, and its place is occupied by good farm lands, which produce excellent crops; and so valuable is land for agricultural purposes, that I was informed it commands a rent of two pounds to the acre; and if a farm is to let, there are ten tenants eager to take it—and this is general all over the Hundred—although all grumble at the price. Agricultural labourers' wages here are 18s. to 20s. per week, without a cottage.

STORETON HALL

The hall of the Storetons is built of the white stone of the neighbourhood, obtained from the adjacent quarries, and must have been a large and fine baronial mansion in its day. Now there is only enough remaining to make the interested pedestrian wish there was more; but one pointed and ecclesiastical-looking window in the great hall, which projects at right angles, is particularly noticeable, and some ancient doorways are of great interest.

Storeton, in 1120, was presented to Allan Sylvester, and his granddaughter succeeding to the estate, conveyed it by marriage to Alexander, said to have been the steward of the household, and he assumed the name of Storeton. From the Storetons it passed by marriage to Sir Thomas de Baunville in 1315, whose eldest daughter Jane, or Joan, married Sir William Stanley, who entered Wirral for the first time, and whose descendants were destined to play so large a part, not only in the history of Wirral, but in the history of England.

The story of the marriage is a romantic one, and is set out in full by the great and industrious Ormerod. He says: "Of this marriage a curious account is given in a return to a writ of inquiry into the truth of 'an assertion made by one William de Stanley that a marriage had been contracted between him and Joan, aged 20, eldest daughter of Philip de Baunville, deceased,

Storeton Hall—the Home of the Stanleys

CHELSEA

chief forester of the Forest of Wirral, *per verba de presenti*,' which words were spoken in the presence of witnesses. Their betrothal was found on the Inq. as follows: 'That on Sunday after the feast of St. Matthew the Apostle and Evangelist, two years ago, viz.: on the 27th Sept. 1282, Philip de Baunville, with his wife and family, was at a banquet given by Master John de Stanley (qy. a priest), on which occasion Joan, suspecting that her father intended to marry her to her step-mother's son, took means to avoid it by repairing with William de Stanley to Astbury Church, where they uttered the following mutual promise, he saying, 'Joan, I plight thee my troth to take and hold thee as my lawful wife until my life's end,' and she replying, 'I, Joan, take thee, William, as my lawful husband.' The witnesses were Adam de Hoton and Dawe de Coupelond (Cheshire Inqs.)."

A very pretty and romantic story, and a very happy marriage too, from which sprang many noble and distinguished Stanleys to fill an honourable record in history. Their great-great-grandson married the heiress of Hooton; his brother, marrying the heiress of Lathom, became the founder of the families of the Earl of Derby and Lord Stanley of Alderley.

The extensive quarries in the neighbourhood are well worth a visit, and have a picturesque appearance, for they are situated on a range of

hills amidst pretty pine woods. As a boy I used to enter the quarries with some fear and trembling, having learned that at one time there dwelt in the neighbourhood a gigantic amphibian, with a body like a newt, called a labyrinthodon, and was once shown the prints in the rock of the hind feet, measuring quite 8 by 5 inches.

Geologically the quarries are of the greatest interest, and contain vast beds of the finest freestone, in places quarried to a depth of 130 feet. The quarries close beside them, called Higher Bebington quarries, situated near Higher Bebington old wind-mill, yield an ample supply of stone, which furnishes London and other places in England with material for some of their greatest buildings.

However, if you go over to examine the quarries, and are interested in geology, there will be an end to your walk, so leave them for another occasion, and descend slightly across the fields until Brimstage is reached, and the inn, with the fearsome sign of "The Red Cat," looms up in front. Pass it, if you can, and notice that the cottages are built on the side of a slight ravine, and that their gardens slope to the road. Through the village passes a small rivulet, and on a pleasing eminence is situated Brimstage Hall, with its ancient square stone tower dominating the village and the immediate neighbourhood. The tower was probably erected

Brimstage Hall

CHELSEA

towards the end of the fourteenth century, and in many ways is one of the most interesting and picturesque buildings in Cheshire. It was for many years the residence of the ancient family of Domvilles, passing from them to the Troutbecks by the marriage, in 1440, of Sir John Troutbeck to Margaret Hulse, who brought to him the estates of the Hulses, Rabys, and Domvilles.

Brimstage has ever a special attraction for those interested in history, and it is impossible to visit it without being reminded of the Wars of the Roses, and especially of the battle of Blore Heath, for Sir John Troutbeck fell in that savage fight, which was also a fatal day for many Cheshire families.

Blore Heath is about a mile from Market Drayton, and the battle was fought in 1459 between the Yorkists, under the Earl of Salisbury, and the Lancastrians, under Lord Audley. Audley's superior force, consisting of ten thousand men, should have insured him a victory over the inferior forces who were under Salisbury's command, but the Earl made up for lack of numbers by cunning and astute generalship. Placing his men in ambuscade he waited until the Lancastrians were re-forming after crossing a rivulet, and then charged down with such violence and suddenness that he threw them into hopeless confusion, and after a bloody battle succeeded

in slaying Lord Audley and over two thousand of his followers. Among the dead lay the owner of Brimstage Hall, with his face to the enemy and his wounds all in front, you may be sure.

Drayton, in his "Polyolbion," describes men of the same name and county fighting against one another at Blore Heath ; and his lines, whether they represent, or misrepresent, the attitude of the men of Cheshire, are interesting :—

"There Dutton Dutton kills: a Done doth kill a Done,
A Booth a Booth : and Leigh by Leigh is overthrowne :
A Venables against a Venables doth stand :
And Troutbeck fighteth with a Troutbeck hand to hand :
Then Molyneux doth make a Molyneux to die,
And Egerton the strength of Egerton doth trie.
O Cheshire, wert thou mad, of thine own native gore
So much untill this day thou never shedd'st before ;
Above two thousand men upon the earth were throwne,
Of which the greatest part were naturally thine owne."

Drayton published the first part of the "Polyolbion" in 1612, and the second in 1622, and together they form a description of England, both parts being filled with antiquarian details and allusions to remarkable events and persons. He had a bright fancy, and his melodious verse contains much information ; those two great and learned writers, Wood and Hearne, not being afraid to accept his statements, nor to quote him as an authority.

Brimstage Hall is now a large farm, the farm-

house having been built on to, and incorporated with, the ancient tower. Large outbuildings have been added, and much good and useful stock is in and about the large farm-yard; the demesne is particularly well kept, and wears the air of being well farmed.

I own to have a particular regard for a village blacksmith, and have ever gained much useful information from men "who have never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book," and at times hesitate near their forges as a bee hesitates near a particular flower, having long been of the opinion that it is a poor man who cannot stand a little smithy smoke; and although the smithy down in the village is not "under a spreading chestnut-tree," it is surrounded by trees, and opposite, in late May, are to be found two chestnut-trees in flower, one white, and the other red, whilst the village is full of pretty flowering shrubs.

Brimstage is known in Tranmere as "the three mile limit," for crossing the fields from Tranmere and passing through Higher Bebington, and over the fields to Brimstage, entitles you to be called by the high sounding name of "A Traveller," and you can demand reasonable refreshment at closed hours. A country man who gave me this information said, "I'm fond of a glass of beer myself, but I'd be damned if I'd walk three miles for it." So I jotted this information down,

believing as I do that he only is a true sage who learns from all the world.

From Brimstage go still over the fields to the vicinity of Thornton Hough, and if you go to that village, in which is a modern church, you will find the walk pretty enough. But it is best to keep to the fields until the Chester high road is reached, and go down to Gayton, after noticing that Gayton Mill, whose sails once spun merrily, is a desolate ruin, and that a new industry in catering for cyclists has sprung up at the Glegg Arms.

Without going too far back into the history of Gayton it must suffice that, like other old and interesting families, the Gleggs had to bless a woman for their inheritance. In Wirral there always seems to have been an heiress handy for a young blood to marry, so Gilbert Glegg married Joan, the eldest daughter and heiress of John de Merton, in 1330, and the estates passed into the Glegg family.

In the period of the Wars of the Roses Thomas Glegg took sides with the house of York, and he and one John Glegg joined Henry Bromborough who, together with some other ardent spirits, seized stores and money at Gayton, which were going to King Henry, to the then enormous value of twenty thousand marks, for which pretty business a warrant was out against them, and William Stanley and others put a period to

Gayton Hall

CHELSEA

their activity by arresting them and lodging them safely in Chester Castle. The Gleggs, however, had chosen the right side, and on the 2nd of March 1461 that bold and active youth with princely bearing, Edward IV., then only in his nineteenth year, was proclaimed King of England, and the Gleggs received their pardon.

Gayton Hall is situated a little south-west of Heswall, standing amidst its pretty, old-fashioned gardens, screened in all directions from the public eye by the large and handsome trees which completely surround it, sheltering it from the winds that sweep up the broad estuary of the Dee, and insuring the inmates of the house a privacy they would not otherwise enjoy, for Heswall has spread itself out to their park walls.

It is a substantial house which has been altered at various periods, whilst a complete mantling of ivy and two very ancient trees in close proximity to the house, called William and Mary, add much to its picturesque appearance. In the days when Parkgate and Dawpool were the favourite places for embarkation from England to Ireland, the Glegg family showed the greatest hospitality, and many interesting travellers were entertained there. In 1689 that great King, William III., whose wisdom and prudence could almost turn defeats into victories, slept beneath its roof, and the next morning conferred the honour of knighthood upon his host, William Glegg.

AN ANCIENT DOVE-COT

Mr. Fergusson Irvine, in his interesting "Notes on the Old Halls of Wirral," says: "In the grounds of Gayton Hall still stands one of the two remaining columbaria or dove-cots in the Hundred of Wirral, bearing the date 1663. The other is at Puddington Old Hall. The privilege of possessing a dove-cot was very highly prized in the Middle Ages, and was one of the many causes of discontent among the peasantry. The sole right of keeping pigeons vested usually in the lord of the manor, and he exercised it to the full, often keeping thousands of birds, which wrought sad havoc among the crops of his tenantry."

Heswall Church

CHAPTER XI

HESWALL

And now, to quote old William Webb : " Our next move is to Heswall, or Hesselwall, a town where stands the parish church and parsonage finely situated, and there extends to it a fair lordship of Thornton Mayow and Raby, another very pleasant view of a large precinct."

Heswall in William Webb's day was termed a town, but forty years ago it was a picturesque village on the banks of the Dee, and the hills were unenclosed land over which the visitor could roam at his sweet will amidst a wealth of heather and gorse, and the picturesque cottages situated on the sides of its steep hills ended in the village. Now it is served by two systems of railways, and has become a residential quarter for people engaged in business in Liverpool, Birkenhead, and Chester. In 1801 the population was 168; in 1811, 323; in 1821 it had diminished to 233, and in 1831 it had grown again to 296, whilst to-day it is well over 2000. Many excellent modern and picturesque houses have been built, for it is high ground standing between two rivers, whose wide

estuaries ensure it a healthful situation, one of the summits rising to 300 feet above the sea level. The church is situated in the village, and its churchyard commands one of the noblest views in Wirral over and up and down the Dee. The pleasant walk over the fields through the churchyard to the shore which bathers used to follow in the early seventies of last century, picking their way in fear and trembling across a field which held a large and fierce bull—is disused, and a Macadam road runs down to the shore, by which some houses have been built; and a field on the brink of the shore now holds swing-boats. "To what base uses we may return, Horatio!" But little need be seen of the swing-boats, and Heswall still wears an air of rurality, for cottages in the village remain with thatched roofs, which are neat and tidily kept, whilst the swallows congregate there as of yore.

The church is interesting and is dedicated to St. Peter and St. Joseph, the tower alone having withstood the ravages of time, for the body of the church was nearly totally destroyed in 1875, when a great thunderbolt burst over it during evensong, killing the organist and the boy who was blowing the bellows.

The church, with the exception of the tower, has been rebuilt, and contains eleven beautiful stained-glass windows by Kemp. One window at the west end of the church, beneath the tower,

where are also the Glegg monuments, is very beautiful, containing three lights, in which are full-length figures of St. Augustine, St. John the Baptist, and St. Ethelbert, whilst beneath is "Giving thanks to God for the dear memory of Mary Adeline Brocklebank, eldest child of Thomas and Mary Petrena Brocklebank, who was born 20th January 1868, and fell asleep 2nd May 1888, this window is dedicated." Another beautiful window of two lights is that to the memory of Henry Royds, containing full-length figures of St. Michael and St. George, and the great east window of five lights is to the memory of the Rev. Mark Coxon, vicar, and was erected by his family. At the east end is a small chapel containing three beautiful windows, soberly and delicately coloured, erected by Thomas and Mary Petrena Brocklebank, calling to memory those noble words of comfort—

"He giveth His beloved sleep."

I had some talk with a farm labourer close to Heswall, and was informed that in this neighbourhood land commanded a rent of two pounds to the acre, and that his weekly wages were 20s. including a nice cottage, to which was attached a good and well-cultivated kitchen garden. Once he had worked for some builders in the neighbourhood, and for a short period had earned as much as 30s. per week, and that was the most

money he had ever earned at one time. He had brought up a family, and placed them out in the world in better positions than he enjoys himself, and had no wish to leave the country for the town, although employment had several times been offered him in Liverpool at much higher wages than he received in Heswall ; but, all things considered, he appeared to be as well off as he would have been in Liverpool if receiving 28s. per week.

He was a very intelligent man, and a great trampling fellow, standing fully six feet, appearing satisfied with his position and lot in life, and in good case, altogether an excellent specimen of

> "A bold peasantry their country's pride,
> When once destroyed, can never be supplied."

From Heswall it is a very pleasant short walk over the fields to Thurstaston, pausing on the way to see the old hall at Oldfield, now two farm-houses, and of little interest except as being the house to which Sir Rowland Stanley of Hooton retired in his extreme old age, and where he died in 1614. Below the pathway the land slopes pleasantly to the Dee, the hedgerows being interesting to the botanist, and whilst you have the land birds about you in the fields and hedges, you may look over the sands of Dee, and watch the interesting sea-birds slowly retreating as they feed before the incoming tide.

DAWPOOL HALL

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Thurstaston has altered much in appearance during the last three decades, for the joint owners of the common land obtained an order for enclosure, and the old road across the hill has been discontinued, and a new one made higher up, passing above the grounds of Dawpool Hall, a mansion erected from designs by R. Norman Shaw, R.A. In the entrance hall, over a carved stone fireplace, is this inscription, "This house was built by Thomas Henry Ismay, and Margaret his wife, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-four, the year of their silver wedding —*Deus dedit—Dabat porro.*"

The summit of the hill, together with 60 or 70 acres of land, mostly covered with heather and gorse, delightful and fragrant in the early spring and late summer, was wisely acquired by the Birkenhead Corporation, and now forms one of the pleasantest and highest recreation grounds in the district, and it is pleasant to notice how readily the citizens of the neighbouring towns forgather there on holidays and in the quiet of the summer evenings. The hill rises 300 feet above sea-level, and commands excellent views of the two estuaries, the Mersey and the Dee, also of the greater part of the Wirral peninsula. The late Sir James Picton took the greatest interest in Thurstaston, and had certain theories concerning it, and the origin of its name, with which we need not necessarily concern ourselves,

but he describes the place so well that he has made it unnecessary for other pens to strive to emulate his. He says: "In a secluded part of the common there is a natural amphitheatre of 4 or 5 acres, surrounded by sloping banks, brilliant in the autumn with the rich purple and crimson tint of the heather and ling. In the centre of this area rises a huge isolated rock of red sandstone, about 50 feet in length, 30 feet wide, and 25 feet high. The shape is rectangular with some slight irregularities. The sides are scarped down nearly perpendicular in two stages. A path running along the ledge leads to the summit. The flat portion of the summit and parts of the sides, where grass and shrubs have not found a-lodgment, are covered with initials and 'graffiti' of successive generations of visitors. It is not a boulder, but part of the bunter red sandstone which underlies the whole neighbourhood. Standing thus isolated, it forms a very remarkable object. How far its original shape has been modified it is impossible to say, but human labour has been largely expended upon it. The sandstone in the locality is nowhere else found in a similar form and position." He then concludes that on this stone the Danes made sacrifices in honour of Thor, or the sun, and would have us believe that fat oxen were sacrificed here, aye, and even that the blood of human victims may once have reddened the stone.

THOR'S STONE

CHELSEA
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Many people do not agree with these conclusions, and whilst ready to admit that the Norsemen were at Thurstaston, and also the Norse origin of the name, they do not consider the remarkable stone a relic of heathendom.

Thurstaston Hall was for centuries the residence of the Whitmores, who were residing there when William Webb visited the place, for he says: "And we come thence to Thurstanton, the ancient seat of the Whitmores of Thurstanton, the owner now—Whitmore, Esquire: which race whether they had their beginning from the city of Chester, their own evidence, wherewithal I am not acquainted, can better declare it than I can." The Whitmores held possession until 1751, leaving six daughters co-heiresses to the property, and in 1816 the estate was divided into twenty-four equal shares with the natural result that a suit at law followed.

Thurstaston Hall is a stone and brick building of various periods, a portion having the appearance of having once been a chapel with a door into the hall. The great hall is entered directly through two large and well-preserved oak doors, strengthened with interesting old ironwork, and which still swing smoothly on their massive hinges. The hall is a large chamber, entirely panelled with old oak, which, over the fireplace, is elaborately and beautifully carved, culminating in six curious and well-preserved figures, each

standing about 13 inches high; and in a niche on the stairs is a full-length, nearly life-size, wooden figure representing a man clad in armour holding a staff of office in the left hand. For several centuries this figure has been said to be a representation of the great Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, who, as Viscount Avranches, contributed sixty ships to the invasion of England by the Conqueror, from whom he received the Earldom of Chester in 1071, together "with land in twenty shires." He carried on a furious war with the Welsh, gaining the name of Lupus (the wolf), endowed the monastery of St. Werburgh, Chester, and died in the year 1101. Thurstaston was granted at the conquest to Robert de Rodelent, the friend and general-in-chief of Hugh Lupus, so that it seems not unnatural that a statue of the great Earl should be preserved here.

The oak work throughout the building is well preserved, and one room, said to be haunted, is very interesting, the roof being supported by large polished oak beams. Serious attention need not, however, be given to the ghost story told in connection with it. The following dates appear on the building—on the western gable, "1680"; and on one of the handsome old gate-posts, "I. W. 1733."

The church is an entirely modern one, and occupies a site close to the church built in 1824,

which again replaced a church which stood within the courtyard of the hall. Several of the stained-glass windows are very beautiful, and the organ, the gift of the daughters of the late T. H. Ismay, Esq., to whose memory it is erected, contains painted wings in the early Italian style. The tower of the church, built in 1824, remains standing in the churchyard, and close to it is a grave of the deepest interest to all connected with Liverpool. On an altar tomb is deeply cut "Sacred to the memory of Thomas Henry Ismay, who died fully trusting in God's Mercy on Nov. 23, 1899, in the 63rd year of his age. Great thoughts, great feelings, came to him like instincts unawares. Also of his wife, Margaret Ismay, who passed away in the same trust on April 9, 1907, in the 70th year of her age. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"; and within a wreath of laurels: "In loving memory of Margaret Alice. Born March 22, 1869. Died August 11, 1901. Wife of James Ismay. 'Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'"

"Men fear death as children fear to go into the dark," exclaimed Lord Bacon, but here in the cold tomb lies one who looked death steadily in the face, and without a murmur, met his untimely death before he had fully reached the evening of his life, believing with Lord Bacon "that it

is as natural to die as to be born," and trusting in God's mercy. The motto of the ancient Westmoreland family from which he sprang was, "Be mindful," and never was a motto better lived up to, nor more characteristic of the man.

Most of the great oceans have seen his flag, and he has left to Liverpool if not his own mantle of inspiration, at least an example to "be mindful," and as I turn away from the tomb of this great man a verse of the hymn he loved so well, and quoted so often, comes crowding into memory—

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day."

It is a pleasant passage over the fields to Irby. A very pretty village, in which are several picturesque old farm-houses, with many good and well-farmed acres attaching to them, where is also "The Anchor Inn," with its picturesque sign of a great golden anchor swinging above the entrance.

Irby Hall, though considerably altered, still retains much of its ancient form and semblance, and is the most picturesque building in northern Wirral, carrying the mind back to ancient times. It is surrounded by a deep moat, very distinctly traceable, and within the moat once stood the ancient manor-house of the abbey. The western

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Irby Hall

mound is unusually high, and the place was of necessity of great strength, because the Welshmen easily crossed the Dee, on plunder bent, the monks having to protect their grange, or stores, with the strongest works.

Irby Hall, though now a farm, was long the residence of a branch of the Glegg family, and is built in the usual half-timbered style of the period, standing embosomed in trees of a large growth. The place did not escape the watchful eye of William Webb, who says, "And near unto this lies Irby, another fair lordship wherein the Balls, freeholders, have a good seat." It is a good seat still, and it is hoped will long remain in its well-kept and interesting condition, so that time will not be allowed to work its decay, nor fill up the large and deep moat.

From Irby the road goes to the north down to the village of Greasby, where are several most picturesque old farm-houses, among them Greasby Hall, with an interesting porch and a large iron-studded door. The Monks of St. Werburgh, on obtaining possession of the whole manor, claimed here, as in their other manors, "the privileges stated in their plea to the writ of *quo warranto*, 31 Edw. III., namely, infangtheof, wayf, stray, goods of natives, felons and fugitives, and view of frank pledge, at their manor-house of Irreby."

Leaving Greasby and passing through Wood-

church, which we revisit and describe in our next walk, Arrowe Hall is passed, a large mansion, formerly the seat of John R. Shaw, Esq., and passing south for a short distance along the Chester road, a path will be found on the left going over the meadows to Landican. Here are a few farm-houses, but the place is not so attractive as is its name. It is, however, a progressive little hamlet, for in 1801 the population was but forty-five, and in 1811 forty-seven. By 1821 it had grown to fifty-three, in 1831 to sixty-one, whilst in 1901 it reached seventy-one, which all goes to show that there are some places in Wirral where they have a fear of lazy families and not of large ones.

That they had faith in early marriages is shown by an extract from an old will of Ralph Axon, of Landican, which says: "My Will is that John Smith shall marry my daughter Ann Axon when he cometh of the age of fifteen yeres, but if he refuse to marry her, then let him pay her the sum of one hundred marks and my wife shall make it one hundred pounds, but if my daughter refuse him, then it to be but one hundred marks."

In a short distance from Landican the path over the fields climbs steadily to Oxton.

HARVEST TIME, NEAR IRBY

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CHAPTER XII

OXTON

Has Oxton changed extraordinarily of late years in other ways besides in population, or was Ormerod in a vexatious mood when he wrote in 1816: "The village of Oxton is mean and small, composed of wretched, straggling huts, amongst roads only not impassable. The township occupies an eminence which commands a full view of the buildings and shipping of Liverpool, exhibiting a picture resembling metropolitan bustle and splendour almost immediately below the eye; but no degree of civilisation or improvement has reached this part of the opposite shore, which is a scene of solitude broken in upon only with the voice of the cowherd or the cry of the plover. Bleak and barren moors stretch round it in every direction, and exhibit an unmixed scene of poverty and desolation."

Now you may stand on Bidston Road close to St. Saviour's Church surrounded by large and pleasant dwellings, whilst before you to the west and south is a fair tract of land sloping to Woodchurch, and nearly everywhere are evidences of

prosperity. If Ormerod did not write bitterly then Wirral has changed inordinately, not only in population, but in the character of the inhabitants, for east, west, north, and south outside the town I have met with some poor people, but with no squalid poverty, and the country children have worn a particularly well-cared-for and "mothered" look.

That the houses and roads have changed greatly since Ormerod's day is certain, and is a welcome sign of progress. The price of land in Oxton used to be so much per acre. Now if you desire to buy any they will quote it to you per yard.

Avoid the roads, and go over the fields to Woodchurch. Here again you will find the place has grown, for in 1801 the population numbered but 52. In 1811 it was 76, by 1821 it had decreased to 74, and in 1901 it was no less than 140. But all this is by the way—the "play's the thing," and we have journeyed here to see the interesting church, one of the prettiest in Wirral, and worthy a visit if but to see the beautiful stained-glass windows by Kemp, which give those by other hands in the same church a gaudy appearance, quite out of keeping with the building, with its Norman window, and the fine old oak beams of the nave. The window in the south aisle is truly a great piece of work, and an enduring monument to Kemp, so sober is it

WOODCHURCH

in colour, yet so rich and exquisite in design. It is of six lights, and is to the memory of George King. The eastern window is filled with stained glass, some of which is ancient, having been brought from the church of a monastery suppressed at the French Revolution. Two curious windows filled with richly stained glass are in the porch, and are well worthy of examination. The churchyard is interesting, and contains the base of an ancient cross, to which has been added a modern shaft erected to commemorate the jubilee year of Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

A curious charity was attached to the parish, for James Goodacre, of Barnston, gave 20 marks in 1525 to buy 20 yoke of bullocks for the poor of the parish, which sum was afterwards set apart for the purchase of cows to be hired out to the poor at 2s. 8d. per annum. The cows were annually brought into the rectory court and examined, and all persons convicted of misconduct were excluded from the benefits of the charity for three years.

From Woodchurch pass over the fields again, even if it be wet and the way muddy ; it will be found more pleasant than the road, and hark how Ormerod describes the pretty country through which you are passing : "A district which appears as if it had come unfinished from the hands of nature, and is certainly under little obligation to the improvements of man." If that

was a true description how hard must man have worked during the last ninety years to produce this excellent land, full of good seventy or eighty-acre farms all the way between Woodchurch and Upton.

A young farmer whom I chanced to meet told me the farms let readily at from £2 to £2, 12s. 6d. per acre, although he considered this latter price far too high, yet admitted that if a farm was to let, even before it was generally known, the landlord had fifty prospective tenants. Farm labourers' wages here are 18s. to 20s. per week, in most cases without cottages.

Upton is entered by a road into which the footpath leads, and passes between two inns with the high-sounding titles of the "Horse and Jockey" and the "Eagle and Crown" standing on either side of the road. Upton has altered greatly of late years, and many new houses and some shops have been built there. The church is modern and uninteresting, and was built by William Inman, one of the pioneers of emigration by steamship, and replaced an earlier one, which had replaced the earlier one of Overchurch, in which stood the stone with the runic inscription, which is usually translated as "the people reared the monument pray for Athelmund." Each of the churchyards is in a different quarter of the village.

Behind the water-works pumping-station a path

crosses the fields and passes below Bidston wood to the interesting little grey village of Bidston, which, in spite of the changes in the near neighbourhood, wears still its old time-worn ancient aspect. The pathway issues on to the high road nearly opposite the church, which stands above the village on a commanding ledge of grey rock, out of which its ancient tower seems to grow. The square embattled tower was built about 1520, and over the western door are shields containing the cognizances of the earls of Derby, amongst them one containing three legs of man is distinctly traceable. The interior of the church is not of great interest, and need not occupy much time.

A little higher in the village is Bidston Hall, standing in a commanding position on a rocky ledge built of the stone of the neighbourhood :—

"And so we come to Bidston," writes William Webb, "a goodly house demesne and park of the right honourable William, Earl of Derby : which, though it be less than many other seats which his honour hath wherein to make his residence when he is so pleased : yet for the pleasant situation of this, and the variety of noble delights appendant to it, his lordship seems much to affect the same, and enlargeth the conveniences therein for his pleasure and abode many ways, which, with craving pardon for my bold collection, I suppose his

honour doth out of his honourable love to this our country, that we might have the more of his presence here, where he bears the great places of his Majesty's lord lieutenant in the causes military, and the Prince's highness chamberlain of the county palatine, as his noble and worthy ancestors have done before him."

In the front is an ornamental arch through which the hall is seen, overlooking an old-fashioned garden, and part of "the great ston wall" which formerly surrounded the demesne is still standing. The property came into the family by purchase, and descended to that able, wise, and discreet man, Sir John Stanley, who married Sir John Lathom's only child, and who was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland under Richard II. He built and fortified a house in Liverpool, and formed a park on his Bidston estate. The hall was probably built by William, sixth Earl of Derby, one of the most romantic figures of the seventeenth century. He was a younger son, handsome, and with a love of learning beyond his years, and the reading of the books of travel at his command turned his mind to foreign lands, so he visited Egypt, Syria, Jerusalem, and other, in those days, out-of-the-way places. Whilst he was abroad his brother died, and on his return he had a difficulty in establishing his identity, for he had been away for years and had

Bidston Hall

been given up as dead. Having at last established his claim to the vast possessions of his family, he retired in favour of his able and conscientious son James, Lord Strange, afterwards seventh Earl of Derby, dying in Chester in 1642.

James was a staunch Royalist, and looked upon Cromwell and his followers as base usurpers, but having chosen the losing side, his was not the spirit to desert it, and in 1649 he withdrew to the Isle of Man, and all his vast English estates were forfeited. He wrote a letter, which is printed in full below, and it is impossible to look upon one of his residences without it occurring to the memory, for it is one of the bravest and most spirited letters of the period, and will be read with interest and respect for the character of this staunch gentleman, even by those who warm to Cromwell. Cromwell had written to him through General Ireton, offering to restore to him half of his forfeited estates if he would give up the Isle of Man and submit. It was a tempting offer, but the seventh Earl of Derby was made of sterner stuff than that, and, clapping his pen to paper, he sent this dignified and stinging reply :—

"Sir,—I received your letter with indignation and scorn, and return you this answer. That I cannot but wonder whence you should gather any hopes from me, that I should, like you, prove

treacherous to my Sovereign, since you cannot but be sensible of my former actings in his late Majesty's service ; from which principle of loyalty, I am in no whit departed. I scorn your proffers, disdain your favour, and abhor your treason, and am so far from delivering up this island to your advantage, that I will keep it to the utmost of my power to your destruction. Take this for your final answer, and forbear any further solicitations ; for if you trouble me with any more messages on this occasion, I will burn the paper, and hang the bearer ; this is the immutable resolution, and shall be the undoubted practice of him, who accounts it the chiefest glory to be, His Majesties most loyal and obedient servant, DERBY."

"CASTLE TOWN, 12*th July*, 1649."

Learning Charles II. was advancing from Scotland, he hastened to England to join his monarch, and at Wigan, with but 600 horse, bravely withstood a body of 3000 horse and foot. He was captured later at the battle of Worcester, and in violation of a promise of quarter given in 1651, was beheaded in Bolton. His pathetic letter to his three children is as touching as anything in literature :—

"DEAR MALL, MY NED, AND BILLY,—I remember well how sad you were to part with me, but now I fear your sorrow will be greatly increased

JAMES STANLEY, 7TH EARL OF DERBY, HIS COUNTESS AND CHILD

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to be informed that you can never see me more in this world; but I charge you all to strive against too great a sorrow, you are all of you of that temper that it would do you much harm; and my desires and prayers to God are, that you may have a happy life; let it be as holy a life as you can, and as little sinful as you can avoid or prevent. I can well now give you that counsel, having in myself at this time so great a sense of the vanities of my life, which fill my soul with sorrow; yet, I rejoice to remember that when I have blessed God with pious devotion, it has been most delightful to my soul, and must be my eternal happiness. Love the Archdeacon, he will give you good precepts: obey your mother with cheerfulness, and grieve her not, for she is your example, your nursery, your counsellor, your all under God; there never was, nor never can be a more deserving person. I am called away, and this is the last I shall write to you. The Lord my God bless you and guard you from all evil. So prays your father at this time, whose sorrow is inexorable to part with Mall, Neddy, and Billy.—Remember, DERBY."

Standing at the foot of the scaffold he exclaimed, "My God, I thank Thee that I am not afraid to go up here. There are but these few steps to my eternity"; and with these words he went to his God like a soldier and a Christian gentleman.

His wife was the grandchild of William the Silent, Prince of Orange, and her heroic defence of Lathom House is well known. Seven days before her husband's execution the gallant lady received a summons from Captain Young, of the *President* frigate, to surrender the Isle of Man, where she commanded during the absence of her husband. The dignified and brave reply was that she was charged with the duty of keeping the island by her lord's command, and that without his orders she would never give it up.

Ultimately Bidston Hall and its demesne passed into the possession of Sir Robert Vyner, a London goldsmith and banker, in whose family it still remains.

Pass the hall and enter the wood which clings to the western side of Bidston Hill, and bless the men who saved these 47 acres on the crest and sides for the public. Many noble buildings have been provided for the citizens of great towns, but this, one of Nature's buildings, is perhaps the noblest of them all, for on the summit, which rises 200 feet above the sea, is a view which, on a clear day, cannot be surpassed in Cheshire, of the Welsh and Cumberland hills, and the whole length and breadth of the Wirral peninsula.

The sails of the old mill at the south end of the summit spun merrily until well into the sixties of the last century. The observatory, which occupies the northern end of the hill, takes an active

part in all astronomical and meteorological matters within the scope of its instrumental equipment, and is a station for noting the passage of earthquakes, of which numerous interesting records have been published. Formerly there were fifty-eight flagstaffs arranged along the summit, which were used for signalling the arrival of merchant vessels in the offing, and telescopes were directed to the summit from the old churchyard in Liverpool for information.

Descend through the wood, and notice the wonderful show of rhododendron blossom if it is early in June, and go down to Bidston Station, past twenty new houses, which look red and raw after the quiet little grey village, and cross over the marsh, on which they now play golf, to Wallasey Church.

The church was burnt down in 1857, the ancient tower alone remaining in close proximity to the new church built in 1859. The style of the old tower is of the period of Henry VIII., and closely resembles that of Bidston, and would appear to have been built in 1535. The parish registers are interesting, and among the marriages is chronicled that of Raphe Sampson and Margarett Dobbe, the bridegroom being only sixteen and the bride fourteen years of age, the marriage taking place in 1596.

Wallasey village has lost much of its ancient character, for the district has become a large

residential quarter, and is wearing a very different aspect from that of the day when William Webb arrived there and wrote, "In Walley, or Walsey, a town which hath fair lands, and where lies those fair sands, or plains, upon the shore of the sea, which for fitness for such a purpose allure the gentlemen and others oft to appoint great matches, and venture no small sums in trying the swiftness of their horses." Be sure they wagered for no small amounts in those roaring, hard-drinking days. We know that William, Earl of Derby, lost Neston in some gaming transaction to William Whitmore, of Leighton, and a gentleman of the name of Corbet, a distinguished family near Shrewsbury, wagered that his leg was the handsomest in the kingdom, staking immense estates on the point, and won his bet. In the *Annual Register* for 1788 twenty thousand pounds are mentioned as being staked on a walking match.

CHAPTER XIII

MERSEY TO DEE

"THE secret of making oneself tiresome," said Voltaire, "is not to know when to stop;" but we are very near our journey's end, having but one more walk to accomplish along the seashore from the Mersey to the Dee. There are not many places in England where you can walk along the shore of the estuary of one great river and see the ships going down to the sea, and join another wide estuary, where the ships are shaking the salt sea-water from their sides and dipping between the billows, when the wind freshens from the north-west, as they make their way wearily to port.

There is a pleasure in being down by the pathless sea for a whole day, for it brings with it a feeling of freedom and aloofness that is not felt whilst walking inland. This indeed is "no man's land," and no Footpaths Association is needed to keep the long seashore walk open. It is true that no sweet-singing birds are to be heard, except where the fields run closely by the fringe of the shore; but there are always the interesting sea-birds, and in their shrill cries it is still possible to

find a strain of wild music, whilst it is ever a pleasure to watch them feeding on the tail of some great sand-bank. No flowers are here, but instead we have the sea-weeds, which, to the understanding mind, are indeed "flowers of the sea."

I have heard the sea complaining on many shores, and know what it is to see the Indian Ocean come tossing in, and to lose myself within the tangle of the China Seas, or to watch from a great headland the long roll of the Pacific Ocean. But in its way there is nothing more enjoyable than on a fine breezy day to set off from New Brighton, along the shore of the Mersey estuary, and walk to the estuary of the Dee.

New Brighton has altered greatly for the worse, and again for the better, during the past century, and when it is now beheld with its large pier and terrace after terrace of houses, and streets of well-stocked shops, it seems strange that one writing in 1830 should describe it: "Rising out of the sea by a succession of lofty ridges it offered an inducement for the erection of villas, retreating one above another, without the view from the upper ranges being in the slightest degree intercepted by the houses below them." So New Brighton became a place of residence and then fell on degenerate days, when a huge and ugly terrace of cheap lodging-houses was erected, and the sands were disfigured with all kinds of cheap shows suitable to the Chowbent cheap-tripper.

But in these later days it has again taken its place as a residence by the sea, and its shores are again pleasant to walk on.

Westward, like the course of empire, let us take our way, and New Brighton is soon left behind; but before we leave it let us not forget that Edwin Waugh—the author whose writings are so full of human nature—once resided here. He is not so largely read as he used to be, but there was a time when few Lancashire operatives were not familiar with his lines, "Come whoam to the childer an' me." It was the writer's privilege to stand for some years on intimate terms with him, and his good stories and lively conversation will not readily be forgotten. The son of a Rochdale shoemaker, he was quite self-educated, and his village idylls, a series of stories in prose, are charmingly written, whilst as a singer his "Poems and Songs" have also secured for him recognition as a poet.

Passing beneath the Red Noses, above which Mr. Lamport, the founder of the famous shipping firm of Messrs. Lamport & Holt, used to reside, and whose early and tragic death caused deep sorrow to a large circle of friends, and passing beneath huge hills of fine sand, whose feet stand just above high water, we are beyond the houses and beating steadily down upon the Leasowe embankment, at the commencement of which is situated Leasowe Castle, now an hotel, but in

former days an interesting house, and the seat of Sir Edward Cust, Bart. In Ormerod's day it was possible from the terrace of the Castle to see, during a summer solstice, the sun rise and set in the sea. The picture produced is from a drawing by R. G. Kelly engraved by J. Godfrey. Canute's chair is still in the grounds close to the embankment, and on it is deeply cut, "Sea, come not hither, nor wet the sole of my foot."

Leasowe Castle was at one time called New Hall, which at a later date was changed to Mock Beggar Hall, and then rose to the dignity of a Castle, and at one period was the residence of the Egertons of Oulton, but passed by purchase to William Boodee, and from his widow the Castle and estate afterwards became the property and residence of General the Hon. Sir Edward Cust, Bart., K.C.H., who saw active service, and was Colonel of the 16th Lancers; a friend of Queen Victoria, and Master of the Ceremonies for many years.

The Leasowe racecourse was on the low flat land in the immediate neighbourhood, and it is stated that one of the ancient towers of Leasowe Castle was originally built by Ferdinando, fifth Earl of Derby, as a stand to better his view of the races, and also to keep his horses and hawks in. Ormerod says: "But whatever the ostensible reason for the erection of a structure so substantial that the sea air and the storms of three

Leasowe Castle, 1850–60

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centuries, in an exposed situation, have failed to affect it, it is more likely, perhaps, that it originated in a desire on the part of its builder to be prepared for any eventuality the disturbed times in which he lived rendered probable, . . . it would be particularly serviceable to one of Lord Derby's great possessions as a temporary place of refuge, and of embarkation to Ireland or the Isle of Man. The present tower seems to have been erected in 1593, if we may trust a date sculptured evidently at that period, beneath a rudely cut figure of "the legs of man."

Horse-racing was then in its infancy, and must necessarily have been more or less of a local character on account of the state of the roads and the difficulty of travel. On February 15, 1672, a notice was published in the *London Gazette* by Charles, Earl of Derby, with many other gentlemen in Cheshire and Lancashire, "of a five mile course for a horse-race, near the town of Liverpool," which was described as "one of the finest grounds of its length in England," and neither the courses at Toxteth nor Melling answer this description so well as Leasowe. In August 25, 1683, James, Duke of Monmouth, attended the horse-races here, and "won the plate on his own horse." After winning his race the Duke offered to race the beaten jockey on foot, and again beat his man. He attended the races with a great retinue, and was received with great enthusiasm.

LEASOWE RACES

The first sweepstakes were established in 1723, and were for many years called the "Wallasey Stake." On this occasion the Dukes of Devonshire and Bridgewater, Lords Derby, Gower, Molyneux, and Barrymore, Sir Richard Grosvenor, Mr. Watkin Williams Wynne, Mr. Egerton, Mr. Cholmondeley of Vale Royal, and Mr. Buckle Mackworth engaged to subscribe twenty guineas a year, to be run for on the course at Wallasey on the first Thursday in May in each year. Evidently, from the names mentioned, the races and course here were well known and popular, and the first "Derby" is stated to have been run in this neighbourhood. The course fell gradually into disuse on the establishment of a good course on the opposite side of the Mersey at Melling, which was afterwards removed to Aintree, where the "Grand National" is at present an event that attracts attention in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Standing on the embankment now, the eye rests on numerous villas which occupy the meadows of former days, whilst away in the north is the Irish Sea, and in the west the noble view of the Snowdon range. In the foreground is Saughall Massey, which William Webb describes "as a very gallant lordship"—why, it is hard to guess, but, like most of the other villages in Wirral, it has increased its population from 98 in 1801 to 186 in 1901.

LEASOWE LIGHTHOUSE

A little to the east of Saughall Massey lies Moreton on the plains, which stretch out below Bidston Hill. Here the Tranemores of Tranmere and the family of West-Kirbies held land during the reign of Edward III.; and here is a modern church erected in 1863 by William Inman, the founder of the Inman Line of steamships between Liverpool and New York. The plains at Moreton are below the level of the highest tides, and were it not for the great embankment they would be under water nearly as far as the village. Continuing along the top of the embankment, where the surface is excellent, the pedestrian is in a position to command the view on either side, and if the wind is too strong from the north-west, the prevailing quarter, or if the eye tires of the sea, it is always possible to descend the breakwater and proceed along a path by its side, completely sheltered from the wind, and to hear the water roaring, if the tide be at the full, without seeing anything of the sea, and to hearken to the call of the sea-birds on the seaside, whilst listening to the carolling of the larks in the fields, by the side of which the path runs.

The lighthouse is not now used for nautical purposes, having flashed its message of warning to mariners for the last time in 1908. It is interesting to know that the old lighthouse at Leasowe, which this lighthouse replaced, was one of the earliest built in England, under powers of

the Act, and that the land was purchased in 1764 by the Liverpool Corporation from William Hough for a consideration of £42 for the twenty square yards. The earliest lighthouses were erected as private speculations, that on the Smalls Rock in the Bristol Channel being built by order of a Mr. Phillips of Liverpool, who was a Quaker. He said he built it as "a great holy good to serve and save humanity," and he certainly accomplished his object, but as he was allowed to levy dues on passing ships it brought him in a large annual income, and after his death Trinity House purchased it from his family for £170,000. The lighthouse erected on the Skerries close to Holyhead, which was also a private speculation, was purchased for £450,000.

The embankment stretches along the shore for nearly two miles to Meols, where it is joined by a new embankment, and also by the new road by the sea-side, which runs along the promenade to Hoylake, so that pedestrians have three courses open to them—to proceed along the shore, or on the top of the embankment, or on the road. The shore is exceedingly interesting at Meols, opposite to the village of Great Meols, in which was settled so far back as 1330 the ancient family of that name. They were connected with many of the leading families of Cheshire, and were warm supporters of the cause of Charles I., and knew what it was to suffer for loyalty to the throne.

The Submarine Forest

On the shore will be noticed as Meols is reached, and Hoylake's new breakwater stretches to join the new embankment, a collection of tree stumps resembling in the distance a small forest outside a settlement where the axe of the backwoodsman has swung to good purpose, leaving the roots and stumps to be removed during future years. This is the famous "Submarine Forest," locally known as the "Meols Stocks," and is covered at each tide. William Webb, in 1622, declared, "Some are of opinion that they have lain there ever since Noah's flood." Without committing ourselves to "Noah's flood," rest assured that these trees once knew what it was to feel their sap rising in the spring-time of the year, and that where the sea now thrashes their gaunt remains was a forest of oak and fir. The roots still cling to the black earth, and here and there a prostrate trunk of oak is visible. Evidently there was wild work when the sea first burst among the trees and, after tearing its way through the forest, retreated, and again advanced to complete its work of destruction; and the obvious conclusion is that hereabout the sea has advanced permanently, and that the land at one time extended seaward for a great distance, for the remains of some of the trees are so much below high-water mark that, were they young and green now, the waves would pass among their topmost branches. Amidst the tree-stumps

hidden in the black earth objects of great interest have been discovered, consisting for the most part of ancient knives, cross-bow bolts, and prick spurs, all made of copper, bronze, brass; and a few articles have been found made of gold, besides numerous coins, some Roman, others ancient British pieces.

Mr. Ecroyd Smith states that an ancient graveyard was discovered at extreme low water after an unusual spell of north-easterly winds, but he is now generally believed to have been mistaken.

Away out on the Dove Spit was probably situated the ancient town of Meols, where, in ancient times, the Romans listened to the roar of the incoming tide, and near which their galleys tossed securely at anchor, or sped away up the Dee to Chester. And so we pass on, feeling that the world is wider and older than most of us consider, and indeed a great book, which, if we could but read correctly, would raise the curtains of the past and shed a new light on history.

From Dove Point to Hoylake used to be a heavy sandy walk, but now you may go on a good road above the sands, for Hoylake has spread itself out, and the old village is nearly lost amidst "improvements," the famous Hoyle Lake being nearly obliterated by the gathering sands. Yet what a place it used to be! In Queen Elizabeth's reign 4000 foot soldiers and 200

horse were quartered in the neighbourhood, and set sail from Hilbre to put a period to the Tyrone rebellion ; and in the spring of 1689, when word came to England that King James had landed in Ireland, an army under the Duke of Schomberg was sent against him. I like to think of Hoylake in those days, with the Dee crowded with men-of-war and transports, dancing in the then deep water off Hilbre. The army was somewhat of a ragged crew, for the bulk were taken from the plough, although there was one brigade of steady Dutch troops under the command of the Count de Solmes. Those were trying times for the people in the neighbourhood of Hoylake, for be sure the soldiers of those days were none too particular, and the officers would sally forth bent on wine, whilst the men were proficients in robbing a hen roost, or in rounding up a few ducks, although the brave Duke of Schomberg, a great and courteous gentleman, enjoying, although full of years, a vigorous old age, would be sure to do what he could to keep his men in hand. At last the Duke, with the trusted officer, Count Solmes, general of the foot, numerous officers, and nearly 10,000 men, were got safely aboard the ships, and embarked at the Hoyle Lake for Ireland, leaving behind them poor John Van Zoelen, who died on September 3rd, to be buried in West Kirby Church.

DEAN DAVIES' ACCOUNT

The following summer large bodies of troops passed through Hoylake. Listen to the account given by Dean Davies:—

"1690. *April 26th* (*Saturday*) we dined at our lodgings (in Chester), and after dinner they all grew very busy in sending their things away to Hoylake, where lay our recruits of horse, being 400, and the Nassau and Brandenburg regiments.

"*27th* (*Sunday*).—In the morning all our sparks were in a great hurry, the wind presenting fair.

"*May 3rd* (*Saturday*).—In the afternoon I put my trunks, bed, saddle, and hat-case on board Mr. Thompson's boat, and sent them to Hoylake, where they were shipped off with the Major's things.

"*May 6th* (*Tuesday*).—In the morning we took horse for Hoylake, and, passing by Neston, we came there about one o'clock. At our coming we found the commissary at the parsons at dinner with Count Scravenmore, where we waited on him, and got an order for a ship to carry 18 horses and 23 men. Then we dined at one Barker's, where it cost us each two shillings, and in the evening we went out to a farmer's house, where Frank Burton and I lay together."

He then describes some difficulties with the major's tumbril, and tells how he breakfasted in

the morning, "and paid for ourselves and horses three shillings each," and how at last the horses were safely shipped. "The major and I walked a mile on the strand, and went into two islands in the bay, and then came on board, all the rest of our company being on board another ship drinking: they all came to us in the evening, and we lay on board all night."

A roystering, roaring crew, depend on it, that lay on the ship drinking and in a ferment of jollity. I wager the farmers about Hoylake, West Kirby, and Neston were glad to see the ships scudding away, their sails filling and bellying before the freshening gale.

But the next month was a historic one in the annals of Hoylake and the Dee, for King William III., who was still called in Ireland the Prince of Orange, travelled hard from London, and reached Chester in five days. His army was camped on the great plains stretching from Hoylake to Great Meols, and in the Dee awaiting his arrival was the great and gallant Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovel. The King was at Chester on the 10th, where he attended divine service in the Cathedral, and, taking boat down the Dee in the afternoon, he slept at Gayton Hall, knighting his host next morning ere he sailed. Samuel Mulleneaux, writing in 1690, says: "On Wednesday (Thursday), June 12, in the morning, his majesty, accompanied with His Royal Highness

the Prince of Denmark, and several other persons of quality, embarked at Highlake, and the same afterwards went out to sea, but the wind wavering made not much way that day." I declare I never visit the King's Gap without in fancy seeing the great King passing down with his attendant retinue through the gaping crowd to perform his appointed task. Not jogging sleepingly down to the boats with a mincing gait, for those were brisk days, and the King hated noise and flattery. A few words of sharp command, tramp, tramp, and away they would go down to the King's Gap. There would be sure to be some one wanting him to touch for the King's evil, and as certain as he touched, he would exclaim, as he did elsewhere, "God give thee better health, and better sense."

Look back but one hundred and fifty years, and it will be found that the Hoyle Lake was half a mile wide, having 15 feet of water at its western, and 30 feet at its eastern, entrance. The following letter appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* on June 1796, just one hundred and thirteen years ago, and it will be noticed that in those days the Hoyle Lake was capable of accommodating vessels of any size then frequenting the coasts :—

"I am now writing to you, Mr. Urban, from the extreme point of the Hundred of Wirral in Cheshire, near the broad estuary of the Dee,

and only seven miles from the confluence of the more commercial waters of the Mersey with the ocean. Your last *Magazine* has noticed Miss Seward's poetical address to the proprietor of High Lake, some of the lines in which are, indeed, not less elegant than classically descriptive. The Hoyle sand breaks the force of the waves, so as to render the lake a safe road for vessels of any size in the roughest weather; and it is strictly true that 'age and infirmity may securely plunge' during the highest tides and most boisterous gales, such, indeed, as we have lately experienced for a length of time, at this season exceedingly unusual. The hotel lately erected by Sir John Stanley, the lord of the manor, is situated within a few yards of the beach, and contains a variety of commodious apartments, both public and private, very comfortably furnished. The charges are very moderate, the table well and amply supplied, and nothing is wanting on the part of the persons who have the management of it to render this house as pleasant and convenient as can be desired. Although, at the first glance, we appear shut out from the rest of the world, a very short time conveys us to Parkgate (the station of the Dublin packets), across the water into Wales, into the bustle of Liverpool, or the less busy capital of this county. The coast of Flintshire, richly wooded, even to the water's edge, and

singularly contrasting with this naked district, displays itself with great beauty on the other side of the Dee; whilst the rugged mountains of Wales, boldly stretching out as far as Anglesea, form the boundary of the prospect towards the south-west. There is a great extent of fine, short turf along this coast, extending nearly to the Mersey, and affording very dry and pleasant walks and rides, as does also the sand, which is firm and compact, and wholly destitute of pebbles. This shore is protected by a chain of sand-hills, held together by the star-grass or sea-reed, whose long fibrous roots, penetrating deep into the sands, offer a fixed point round which they may collect. This grass is under the especial protection of the law; for, if it were cut and converted to the uses of which it is capable, such as making mats and besoms, the sand-hills would quickly be blown away, and the country behind overwhelmed with a moving sand. The sand-hills are the resort of a very excellent breed of rabbits. The Dee affords abundance of fine salmon, cockles, shrimps, soles, and various kinds of flat fish are taken on the sand-banks and in the lake; and the Liverpool markets furnish an ample supply of the productions of animal and vegetable nature. Every vessel that comes into or goes out of the Dee or Mersey is distinctly seen hence; and the lake is frequently enlivened by brigs and schooners beating to windward, as

well as by the anchorage of the Dublin packets, whose passengers are glad to partake of the amusements and refreshments which the hotel affords. It is well calculated for the inhabitants of the central counties, who, at no great distance from their own houses, will here find genteel society, good accommodation at reasonable prices, and one of the most commodious bathing-places in the island. The lake is distinguished in the maps by the appellation of Hoyle Lake; but Sir John Stanley, having found it termed High Lake in some old writings belonging to the estate, has desired it to be so printed in the advertisements relative to the establishment of the hotel, which was opened in 1793."

Or listen to old William Daniell, R.A., who says in his beautifully illustrated book, entitled, "A Voyage Round Great Britain," undertaken in the summer of 1813:—

"At the mouth of the Dee, off Cheshire shore, are three small islands, which it was our object to see. They are small scraps saved from the general waste committed on this coast by the sea, in consequence, I imagine, of being a little more elevated than the land by which they were surrounded; but they are gradually falling away, being all composed of sandstone, so soft that it may be crumbled with the fingers. We landed

on the larger and most remote of them, called Hilbre Island, which is almost half a mile in circumference, and lies distant a little more than a mile from the mainland. Upon it there is a public-house, the only habitation, and a few rabbits, the only quadrupeds, to which nature supplies a very meagre provision, only part of the island being covered with a scanty sprinkling of grass. It is most important as a station for two beacons, which are raised upon it as guides to vessels through the Swash, a channel between the Hoyle Sands, leading into Hoylake. An admirable roadstead for ships of 600 tons burden. There is another entrance into this road; but with the wind in any degree from the eastward, the Swash is the only outlet by which vessels can escape to sea."

This was written close on to a hundred years ago, and even fifty years ago there was a fair depth of water in the Hoyle Lake, and the steam packets used to take passengers—mostly visitors to Hoylake—for day trips to the various places on the opposite coast of North Wales, the fishermen charging sixpence each for putting passengers on board the packets. To-day Hoyle Lake has for all practical purposes ceased to exist, and the large fishing-boats now dock at Liverpool. For everything we miss we perhaps gain something else, and for everything

we gain we lose something, and the loss of the Hoyle Lake is the price Hoylake has had to pay for the Dee improvements. However, she has gained another attraction, and her splendid golf links are counted among the best in the kingdom, but her sea trade is a thing of the past, and is not likely to be recaptured. Now Hoylake is a place of residence for those who collect their incomes elsewhere, and the old sand-blown road, with the links on one side and wide hungry-looking fields on the other, that used to connect Hoylake with West Kirby, is called a "Drive," and large and pretty houses cluster along it all the way to West Kirby. Pedestrians leave that road to motorists and cyclists, preferring to take their way with hesitating footsteps, and a pang of reproving conscience, across the golf links, for be sure they will spoil some man's "drive," and add to their knowledge of Argot.

It is impossible to leave Hoylake without mentioning the name of the Rev. F. Sanders, M.A., F.S.A., the learned vicar, who has done so much during a large number of years to elucidate the history of the Hundred of Wirral, and whose interesting and valuable work has appeared in *Wirral Notes and Queries*, of which he was one of the editors, and in which publication appeared his excellent series of biographies, entitled "Wirral Worthies." He is also joint

editor of the *Cheshire Sheaf*, and the author of "Historic Notes on the Bishops of Chester," which ran through six volumes of the *Chester Diocesan Gazette*, besides making valuable contributions to the great "Dictionary of National Biography." In his large and well-chosen library is a unique collection of about 300 volumes of the lives and works of the Bishops of Chester, commencing with those of Thomas Morton, 1605, and coming down to the latest work by the present Bishop. Many of the volumes are of the greatest rarity, and the vicar must have read through a prodigious number of catalogues, for it is only those who have tried to make a collection of rare books on one particular subject who are able to realise the amount of thought and industry it entails.

CHAPTER XIV

HILBRE ISLAND

"Give me my scallop-shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage;
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage."

It was on a fine morning towards the end of May that I set off from Hoylake over the Sands of Dee. The wind was blowing from a little north of west, and had a sharp eager feel as it struck the face, but the sun was shining brightly; there was a blue sky overhead, and the coast of Wales, with some of its higher mountains pencilled against the clear sky, looked so near as to invite one to cross over and ascend their slopes, for the tide was at its lowest ebb, the huge banks and plains of sand hiding the channel of the Dee, so that a passage into Wales looked a simple matter. But I knew where the deep channel lay, cutting the Cheshire shore off from Wales, and so I hummed Sir Walter Raleigh's fine lines, which are set at the head of this chapter, as I set off on my pilgrimage to the spot where at one time rested the shrine of the Lady of Hilbree, for

it was here the Benedictines of Saint Werburgh's established a small cell dedicated to the Virgin Mary. I felt perhaps a little hurt by the disrespectful remarks of old Raphael Holinshed, the chronicler, from whom Shakespeare obtained the material for nearly all his historical plays. Listen how sourly he writes about the pilgrims in whose footsteps I was walking: "And thither went a sort of superstitious fools, in pilgrimage to our Lady of Hilbree, by whose offerings the monks there were cherished and maintained." But were they fools, and did pilgrimages invariably lead to lying and idleness? In Japan pilgrimages take place to-day just as they used to take place in England in the fourteenth century, and I spent three long and happy weeks in the company of the Buddhist pilgrims walking along the great central mountain road of Japan to the Buddhist Temple of Zenkoji, one of the most celebrated in the whole empire, and a place to which all good Buddhist pilgrims go. They were among the happiest people I have ever met, and set out on their weary pilgrimage as a sort of holiday, many of them not knowing exactly why they were making it. I remember asking one woman why she had become a pilgrim, and she answered, "It is the spring-time of the year." "Yes," I said, "but why are you making the pilgrimage?" and she said again, "It is the spring-time of the year, and I've lost my son in the

war." And I said, "Do you think this pilgrimage is doing your son any good?" to which she replied, "I cannot tell." "Then," I said, "Do you think you will ever see your son again?" and she replied, "I do not know, but good will come of it, good will come of it." And I expect that many of our English pilgrims set out in the same indefinite way, on a sort of holiday, trusting that good would come of it. Certainly to-day good will come of it, for nowhere will the lungs expand to such sweet sea air. My back was now set fairly to Hoylake, and I went forward over the sands to visit the three islands, the largest and westernmost, Hilbre, then Middle Eye, whilst south of both I stood for a moment on Little Eye, just to say I had been there. They are called "islands," although they are "islands but twice a day, embraced by Neptune only at the full tydes, and twice a day shakes hands with great Brittayne." I thought of old William Webb, who probably never visited the islands, writing in 1622, "Here in the utmost western nook of this promontory, divided from the land, lies that little barren island called Ilbree, or Hilbree, in which it was said there was sometimes a cell of monks, though I scarce believe it; for that kind of people loved warmer seats than this could ever be." If Webb ever was there, rest assured it was on a blowy day in winter, and not on a fine May morning like that which made me envy the

monks their situation. Although Webb doubted the fact, there was a cell of monks on Hilbre, and a very celebrated place it was, and miraculous too, for Richard, Earl of Chester, who, when a young man, was performing a pilgrimage to St. Winifred's Well, in Flintshire, nearly opposite the islands, was set on by a band of Welsh robbers, who drove him for refuge to the Abbey of Basingwerk, where, not feeling too secure, by the advice of a monk of the cell of Hilbre, he addressed himself to St. Werburgh, who is said to have instantly parted the waters of the Dee, throwing up a huge sand-bank, over which his constable, the Baron of Halton, marched his men to the rescue—and that is why the sands are called "The Constable's Sands"—

> "And where the host passed 'twixt bondes
> To this day's been called the Constable's Sondes."

A very pretty story, and the legend would be certain to attract plenty of pilgrims. Not the slightest traces of the cell remain, but a relic of the early church of Hilbre was found about 1853, consisting of a fine cross of red sandstone, said to be of the ninth or tenth century, similar in design to some still remaining in Ireland, and what appears to be a sepulchral cross is built into the wall of an outhouse, but it is covered with whitewash, as is the rest of the building, and its form is only revealed on

a near examination. There is also a well, nearly 40 feet deep, cut through the solid rock, and which may possibly have been sunk by the monks.

Mr. Fergusson Irvine, in his interesting lecture entitled "Village Life in West Kirby three hundred years ago," published in 1895, says :—

"The mention of Hilbre as apart from West Kirby was a feature that puzzled me at first, and does still to some extent, but there appears to be abundant evidence that the island was a really important marine station at this time, and that there were several, and possibly many, permanent dwelling-houses upon it.

"From a most interesting Chester document, recently discovered at Chester by Mr. Sanders, it appears that three hundred years ago a somewhat eccentric Lincolnshire knight—a certain Sir Richard Thimblebye, after whom Thimblebye's Tower on Chester walls was named—was a resident in the island as a tenant of Sir Rowland Stanley, of Hooton, though how Sir Rowland came to be landlord I am at a loss to conceive. In addition to Sir Richard there must have been several shipowners living on the island, for in the list of shipping for 1572, mentioned above, eleven of the ships are definitely stated to be 'of Hilbree,' and only one from West Kirby. And in 1544 six ships are entered at Chester as of Hilbree and one of Caldy.

"The document found by Mr. Sanders at Chester is the evidence given by different witnesses in a suit brought by Mr. Massie, who farmed the rectory of West Kirby, against Sir Richard Thimblebye. The evidence, which contains many curious details, goes to show that the claiming of tithes by Mr. Massie from Hilbre Island was quite a new imposition. Thus Mr. John Brassie of Tiverton, aged sixty years, states that 'about forty-four years ago, being then a child, he was one of the boys of the Chamber to Abbot Birkenshaw, then Abbot of St. Werburgh's, Chester, and by reason thereof . . . familiarly acquainted with Dom John Smith or Dom Robert Harden, monks dwelling on the Isle of Hilbree, and that he was wont to go to Hilbree and there stay for the space of a fortnight together at certain times,' at which times he had seen 'fyshe taken for the monks' use within the water running about the said island with nets, but whether with boat or not he doth not remember, and further saith that he never heard that the said monks paid any tythe of fyshe taken there to the parson of West Kirkbie, or any other, for he saith the said isle was then taken to be of no parish, but was called a cell, belonging to the monastery of Chester, and therefore free from all manner of tythe paying.'"

Another witness states that he lived at Hilbre with the monks for fourteen years—I presume as servant—and adds "he knoweth verie well that the saide Prior and monks had a fyshing boat called the *Jack Rice*, and used to fish there by their servants, and he had often seen much fish taken there to their use," and further states "that the monks had certain kine on the same island and yet paid no tithes of the same."

There used to be a beer-house on the island, but customers were too few when the sea traffic left the coast, and there are tales of great smuggling, which went on in the old days, when the ships stole quietly up the Dee and hid a cargo of contraband, to be removed when an opportunity occurred.

You may pass swiftly over the sands from Little Eye to West Kirby, and if you have not visited that place for thirty years you will find that what you left a village has now grown into a little town, with a parade, in front of which has been constructed a large salt-water lake on the seashore, on which are pleasure-boats; so that at the lowest ebb, when the sands hide from sight even the narrow strip of Dee which makes its way steadily to the sea under the Welsh coast, the artificial lake gives the visitor the feeling that he is still resting by the sea, and he waits with some show of contentment the incoming tide. Years ago the pretty village

of West Kirby spread itself out, and the cottages nestled amidst the heather and gorse on the side of its hills. Now there are large residences on and about the hills, and long streets of houses and shops have taken the place of thatched cottages, whilst like Neston, it can boast of two railway stations belonging to different companies. I prefer to remember West Kirby as a pretty little village before the railway had reached it, where one could arrive and fling oneself down at full length on the clean hill-sides, feeling that the country had been reached at last, and that the town and townsfolk had been left far behind.

Nevertheless it is still possible to find places near West Kirby that are little visited, and where you may feel somewhat a lonely Crusoe, but they need looking for, and when they are found it is best to keep the secret. But there are some coigns of vantage on the hill-sides unknown, or at all events unvisited, even by the oldest inhabitants, where you may lie snugly in the sun and gaze on two very different tracts of country. Looking to the north over the wide expanse of sands, to the west into Wales, to the east over the country to the Mersey, and to the south over a rich tract of meadow and pleasantly-wooded lands of oaks, beeches, and pines in solemn green, over which go homeward a flight of rooks. It is hard to realise, as one lies here in the sun, that

View from Caldy Hill

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SHIPPING IN 1565–1572

West Kirby and Hilbre were once little ports like so many of the places on this side of the Dee. Yet Liverpool in 1565 only returned sailing ships with a total tonnage of 226, and in 1572, but seven years later, licences were issued from Chester to twelve vessels belonging to West Kirby and Hilbre. Hearken to the names of some of the ships when King Henry VIII. was on the throne, just a year after he had married Catherine Parr, and four years before he died :—

The Pride of West Kirkebye	Master,	John Couentrye.
The Trinitie of West Kirkebye	„	Peter Robinson.
The Rose of West Kirkebye	„	Thomas Wright.
The Nutlock of Hilbre	„	Richard Lytill.
The Goodlock of Caldey	„	Thomas Hogg.

And here are the details of a cargo :—

"(35 Henry VIII.)—Richard Loker, in a ship of Hilbre, imported 1600 shepe felles, 68 dere, 69 fawn skins, 6300 broke fells.

"(36 Henry VIII.)—One ship brought in 7 martens' skins, 240 otters, 12 wolff skins, 2 seales' skins, 500 cony fells, 8 fox cases, 46 cople mode hawke.

"The *Katerina of Chester* for the Archebysshop of Dublyn brings 2 horseys which are sent to the Kyng's Grace, and 2 casts of gentle hawks."

An interesting miscellaneous cargo, which shows that there were shipowners in those days on the

banks of the Dee. But the Dee silted up, and at last a good coach road was opened from Warrington to Liverpool, and Liverpool awoke to the occasion, and established a very superior line of packets from Liverpool to Dublin. It was then that the blow to the ports on this side of the Dee was delivered, and intercourse between England and Ireland from the river Dee ceased. Dawpool, but a couple of miles away, was a favourite place of departure for Ireland. Dean Swift, who for years oscillated between Ireland and England to associate with the wits Addison and, especially, Dick Steele, set sail from Dublin for England on the 28th November 1707, landing at "Darpool," and the next day was at Parkgate on his way to Leicester; and in June 1709 he sailed from "Darpool" for Ireland. That was five years after he had published his famous "Tale of a Tub and Battle of the Books." As I look over to Dawpool from my hiding-place I recollect some of his saws: "A penny for your thoughts," "The sight of you is good for sore eyes," "'Tis as cheap sitting as standing," "There is none so blind as they that won't see," "There was all the world and his wife," and,

> "I've often wished that I had clear
> For life, six hundred pounds a year."

And one might go on quoting from this clever satirical eighteenth century writer. Fancy Dawpool a port! However, in the *Gentleman's*

CHELSEA

West Kirby Church

Magazine for May 1822 is the following: "The establishment of the Port of Dawpool is in progress, and a speedy report is expected on the subject from the engineer, Mr. Telford. Independently of the general accommodation which packets would afford at that station, the ready communication between Dublin and the depôt at Chester, where nearly 40,000 stand of arms are kept and the warlike stores, is of vital importance, especially at a time when the sister island is in a state of dangerous fermentation."

Below, and a little to the north, the tower of West Kirby Church is visible, built late in the fifteenth century or very early in the sixteenth. It was one of the earliest foundations in Wirral, for during the restoration which took place in 1870 the foundation of the original Saxon church, together with the bases of two Norman columns, fragments of runic crosses, and two slabs with floriated crosses were discovered.

There is a beautiful and interesting window in the church decorated in the manner of the fourteenth century, and on the walls the most interesting tablet is to the memory of Johannes Van Zoelen, dated 1689. He, poor fellow, was with the army of the Duke of Schomberg, and should have sailed with him to Ireland, but whilst the army was encamped on the plains about Hoylake and Meols, the men suffered much from sickness, doubtless brought on by their long and

severe marches over the terrible roads of those days, and death came like an angel to relieve his sufferings and set him free. The remaining monuments are of no particular interest, but the glory of St. Bridget's Church is its stained glass, by Kemp, whose beautiful and lasting work beautifies several of the churches in Wirral. The east window, of five lights, to the memory of Eleanor Heywood, is most noteworthy—rich, yet sober and delicate in colour. The windows in the south aisle are very lovely, and represent the early life of Christ. They are erected to the memory of Richard Barton, Esq., of Caldy Manor, once a leading family in the Hundred, but now their land has been sold and is being utilised as a building estate.

A curious dispute arose between the monks of the Abbey of Basingwerk and those at Chester concerning the right of the presentation of the church, and Randal de Blundeville is stated to have resorted to military force, and to have boldly taken possession of it.

Not far from me is a column on the hill quite 50 feet high, and though it has stood there for nearly seventy years there was nobody I questioned in West Kirby who could tell me why or when it was erected, although the following inscription is cut plainly upon it:—"This column was erected by the trustees of the Liverpool docks, by permission of John Shaw Leigh, Esq.,

CALDY

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owner of the land, who also granted the stone for its erection, A.D. 1841, as a beacon for mariners frequenting the river Mersey and its vicinity."

Just over the hill to the east lies Grange, which is mentioned in Domesday Book as being the property of Hugh de Mara, but which passed away soon after, along with West Kirby, to the Abbot and Convent of Basingwerk, on the opposite shore of the Dee, ultimately coming into the possession of the Gleggs, who held it for many generations, and where was once their ancient hall. How changed is the scene from those days! Then there was a tiny hamlet by the side of the Dee, striving, after its manner, to become a port, owning ships, and getting its share of the trade that was on foot. Now the houses nestle against the western slopes of the hill, securely sheltered from the biting east wind, and the climate down there is soft and balmy; up here "there's the wind on the heath, brother," and "who would wish to die?"

To the south-east is Caldy, nestling under and about its hill, and few readers of Ormerod's description of it would recognise the Caldy of to-day, for he writes: "The village consists of a collection of straggling fishermen's huts scattered over an eminence near the estuary, which is separated by a deep rocky valley from the parish of Thurstanston." Now it is a pretty village, thanks to Richard Watson Barton, late of Springwood,

near Manchester, Esquire, who purchased the property in 1832, and at once set to work to rebuild the cottages and improve his estate.

Caldy is mentioned in the Domesday Survey as Calders, and was once part of the great possessions of the powerful Robert de Rodelent, one of the Earl of Chester's barons, who perished, sword in hand, in Wales, under a shower of arrows, for none of his enemies dared approach him with the sword. At his death the property passed, presumably, to his illegitimate son, whose heiress, Agnes de Thurstaston, conveyed it by marriage to the Heselwalls, from whom it passed, along with the neighbouring Manors of Heswall and Thurstaston, to the Whitmores, from whose representatives it was purchased by Mr. Barton. Recently it has been developed as a building estate, and pretty dwellings are appearing on and about the hill, which stands 242 feet above the sea level, and commands extensive views up and down the river Dee and over it into Wales. On Caldy Hill I was lucky enough to put up a nightjar, and in a very little time discovered her two young ones nestling amidst the bracken. This interesting bird is one of the latest of our summer migrants to arrive, and on migration from Africa crosses Malta, arriving in England about the middle of May or early in June, and I have found their two beautiful eggs as late in the season as August.

Below me is a town (Hoylake-cum-West Kirby) whose population has grown from 148 in 1801 to nearly 10,000 in 1909. All things are subject to change, but to change and to change for the better are two different things; and the Hundred of Wirral is changing rapidly, for in many places I have noticed commercial activity crushing out rural avocations. If this goes on, as it seems likely to, we shall gain something, but without doubt we shall lose something else very precious to our life—I mean the rural life and occupation of this interesting tract of land. We shall grow rich, doubtless; but let me add that there is an old proverb which states that a crown is no cure for a headache.

And now it is time to get up and go home, for we have been a long journey; and at last we come blithely towards the end, knowing that "the sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much," and that "the smoke of a man's own house is better than the fire of another's."

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Raby Mere
Willaston
Raby
Neston
Ness
Burton
Denhall
Parkgate
Author's Route
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Paths
SCALE - 2 MILES TO 1 INCH
1
2
3
5

CHELSEA